

Fall 2018

PUBLIC SECRETS & PRIVATE IDENTITY: A Look into Lesbi Lives in Bali

Kara Marler
SIT Study Abroad

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection

 Part of the [Asian Studies Commons](#), [Other Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), and the [South and Southeast Asian Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Marler, Kara, "PUBLIC SECRETS & PRIVATE IDENTITY: A Look into Lesbi Lives in Bali" (2018). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 2938.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/2938

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

PUBLIC SECRETS & PRIVATE IDENTITY:

A Look into *Lesbi* Lives in Bali

Kara Marler

Advisor: Astri Indraswari, Gaya Dewata

SIT Study Abroad

Indonesia: Arts, Religion, and Social Change

Fall 2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Acknowledgments	4
Framework	5
Personal Reflection	7
Methodology & Ethics	10
Profile of a <i>Lesbi</i> Community	11
Current Context & Public Perception of LGBT	17
Why so Invisible?	25
Multiple Meanings of Invisibility	30
Conclusion	33
Recommendations for Further Study	35
Bibliography	36

INTRODUCTION

While human sexuality is a central part of life in any historical or geographical context, the cultural implications, practices, vocabulary, and conceptions of sexuality are absolutely specific to a particular place and moment. In a globalizing world however, terms and ideas can and are shared across many cultures in a way that does not always replace indigenous frameworks, but allows a connection to be made between those of similar sexual or gender backgrounds with diverse life stories. This vision was central in formulating my curiosity about the LGBT community in Indonesia- I wish to learn about the differences in gender and sexuality while at times also making connections between shared experiences.

There is extreme vulnerability in making these connections, since publicly identifying as LGBT is difficult and sometimes dangerous for many Indonesians. In January of 2018, one survey reported that 87% of participant see the LGBT community as a threat, and that only 8.6% believe LGBT activity is permitted by religion.¹ In such an intolerant, fearful climate, I understand that I occupy a privileged space to be able to find and talk to members of the LGBT community. My goal of this field study is to use this opportunity to hear stories that would not usually be shared, and understand the life experiences of people who continue to feel and express their identities in the midst of societal pressure.

My research questions specifically concern female sexuality. Because the general topic of gender and sexuality in society is so vast, I chose this concentrated perspective to focus on. Female sexuality is important to distinguish from male sexuality in part because it is often ignored or, if researched, written by those who are not female. Megan Sinnott points out that most often, women's experiences with gender and sexuality are extremely different from men's

¹ Irwa Martua Hidayana, "LGBT and Social Inclusion in Indonesia: What the Surveys Say?," *The Conversation*, 12 February, 2018.

due to different abilities to express, act on, or imagine sexual agency for men and women. She argues that in the context of the United States, using the term “queer” to encompass many different identities together assumes a gender neutral experience that hides the real differences in representation, power, hierarchy, difference in experience between male and female sexualities and individuals.² Similarly, the non-male experience in Indonesia can easily get lost under a broader umbrella of LGBT, with lesbian or other female sexualities assumed to be synonymous with gay male experiences. In this independent field study, I will explore the category of *lesbi* in order to learn about female same-sex identities, lives, and relationships. In order to do this, investigating what gender and gender roles mean, especially for women, was another extremely relevant topic of discussion, along with learning where sexual orientation fits in an Indonesian individual’s identity.

² Megan Sinnott, “Borders, Diaspora, and Regional Connections: Trends in Asian “Queer” Studies.” *Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no 1 (Feb 2010): 17-31.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was by far the most emotionally difficult I have ever undertaken, but I am so grateful to all of my friends and teachers from SIT and throughout Bali that helped me grow and learn from the things I was learning and experiencing. Academic director Bu Ary of course was a brilliant and understanding presence for writing and emotional needs. Thank you also to our language teachers Sani Cahyani, Dian Arisuci, and Pak Yudi for their excellent teaching and fun! I would like to give special thanks to Dek Jengo for his hospitality and guidance through Denpasar as well. Your home and family were beautiful and so welcoming. I owe much to Michelle, another student who was absolutely incredible in helping my most emotional days into ones of growth- I could not have done this project without your help. And of course, I am so indebted to the wonderful gay men, *waria*, and *lesbi* who allowed me to enter their communities, homes, and lives. Your vulnerability, work, and compassion are so inspiring, and will forever encourage me to use my voice and position to connect to others. I cannot thank you enough.

FRAMEWORK

The West is not the original and authentic model of all transformations in the sexual and gender order of Asia.

Megan Sinnott, "Borders, Diaspora, and Regional Connections: Trends in Asian "Queer" Studies," page 18

"I have sought to challenge the idea that the development of a gay identity, culture, and politics reflects a developmental model whereby cities outside of the west are in a process of becoming ever more tolerant and accepting of modern gay identities."

Jon Binnie, *The Globalization of Sexuality*, page 85

These quotes point out the generalizations that many make when attempting to assess similarities and differences between queerness cross-culturally. Because of the history of power imbalances between Indonesia and the west via colonialism and the continuing politics of globalization, I want to avoid writing this paper as a review of how Indonesia 'measures up' in comparison to degrees of safety, freedom, or identity of queer people in the United States. If one doesn't actively challenge the assumption that queer life is lacking here, or a "bad copy" of western queer culture, it will only prove itself true. I will be unable to see the unique manifestations of Indonesian queer life, and will only look for, if even just subconsciously, the ways in which this non-western country is "worse" somehow for queer people than the dominant western narrative of what queer identity should be. I hope to use my own life experience in my research in a productive comparative way without value-judgments.

The first way to separate non-heterosexual identities in Indonesia from a Western-dominated narrative of gender and sexuality is to explore the long tradition of diversity within these categories in the archipelago. In 1855 for example, Dutch lexicographer Rooda van

Eysinga “listed *banci* with *pâpaq* and *roebia* as ‘local, Malaysian terms alongside the Arabic *chontza* for ‘hermaphrodite’.”³ Of these terms, *banci* is the most commonly used today as an Indonesian term for male bodies with feminine presentations and same-sex relations. Its use alongside Malaysian and Arabic terms 150 years ago shows that multilingual and multi-ethnic societies in Indonesia have been exchanging and differentiating slight definitions of sexualities for generations. Thus, attempting to find a gender/sexuality complex that most closely mirrors the West, or conversely, a “most authentic” indigenous sexuality is a flawed exercise. Instead, understandings of gender and sexuality are “complex responses to, and extensions of, culturally determined systems of gender, nationalisms, capitalist labor and consumer practices, urbanization, and transnational movements.”⁴ Throughout this study, I hope to keep in mind the diverse and ever-changing ways in which sexuality is defined and expressed.

³ TD Boellstroff, “Playing Back the Nation: Waria, Indonesian Transvestites” *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (2004): 159-195.

⁴ Sinnott, “Borders, Diaspora, and Regional Connections: Trends in Asian "Queer" Studies,” 17.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Everything I heard about the lives of LGBT people in Indonesia was understood against the backdrop of my ever-present struggle with navigating expectations of gender and sexuality. Though I am experiencing these expectations as someone who does not and cannot understand their full social, political, economic, or religious context in Indonesia, I am often shown that I am breaking many standards by the people who do live in this context. By seeing what is perceived as abnormal, confusing, or strange about me, I was taught much about expectations of femininity, masculinity, and sexual agency.

The most striking experience I had negotiating my own gender identity regarded Indonesians' confusion over my appearance. In public spaces like restaurants, grab-cars, walking in villages or cities, I was asked countless times "*cewek? cowok?*" or in English as well, "Are you a man or a woman?" Almost every day I encountered this, especially when living on my own in Denpasar with no accompaniment by any SIT teachers or staff. In Kerambitan, many people would ask my Ibu this same question when we were in public together. I assumed they did not know I could understand what they were asking her, and always cringed when I watched Ibu respond, "*ya, cewek.*" I was also commonly mistaken for a boy. Many times when I was either mistaken for a boy or asked my gender, there was a follow-up reassurance that I was "*cantik*" (pretty, to women only). This indicated to me that the speaker acknowledged or knew my identity as a woman, but was also so struck or confused about my appearance that they wanted to ask. People telling me about their confusion was a common theme. A man at the *warung* (small food stall) across the street from my house in Denpasar told me with a laugh one evening that he had thought I was a boy until that night. Now that I had entered his shop in traditionally feminine-looking clothes, he knew he had misread me. Another misreading

experience occurred in a Grab-car when the driver told myself and a friend in the car, “Just like brother and sister.” At the most extreme, one woman we walked by on the street pointed at me and asked my friend, “What is that?”

Having such a central identity questioned so repeatedly was a very jarring experience. I usually laughed it off with whomever had asked or commented on my appearance, and confirmed yes I am a girl. I did not want to offend by appearing angry or upset, but felt shaken and confused most of the time. I had no context for why strangers would want to know my gender, or how they felt comfortable asking what I interpreted as such a personal question. I was also very unsure what implications came with my appearance. When I was called *tomboi* or “like a boy,” for instance, would that follow with any assumptions about my sexuality? In a culture of such strict binary gender roles, femininity is linked to narrow aesthetic presentations as well as exclusively heterosexuality. If I was not presenting like a girl, would my sexuality be questioned as non-normative or masculine as well? What would that mean? Though I had no idea if these implications were ever present, explicit questioning of my gender brought anxieties of being “outed” by my appearance to everyone I met. Because of these worries, I struggled greatly with attempting to balance the confusion and hurt these interactions caused me with remembering that cross-cultural communication can easily be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

My reflections on these interactions are deeply personal, but also informative. I hope my experience with negotiating and presenting gender in Indonesia as a queer, androgynous-looking woman can contribute to my research by being an entry point for empathy, compassion, and understanding of some of the ways in which performance and expectation of gender can have real, powerful effects on an individual in both affirming and hurtful ways. I do not claim to relate exactly to an Indonesian LGBT person’s experience or reality, since I also know that my status

as a white American is always a large factor in how I move and am treated here. Instead, I want to acknowledge how I cannot and do not want to remove my personal experiences and feelings from this study. Though they were extremely difficult and confusing, the constant questioning of my identity made me take this topic and the lives I hoped to learn about seriously in a way that is unique. A student who has not felt the complex reality of transgressing gender and sexuality would not produce the same conclusions or thoughts on the subject. Thus, I will insert my own reflections and experiences into this paper to represent the perspective of an outsider to Indonesian culture discovering the boundaries and norms of gender and sexuality via negotiation of their own body.

METHODOLOGY & ETHICS

My methodology consisted primarily of interviews and participant observation. Due to the controversial nature of this topic in Indonesia, finding academic secondary sources was difficult. Though I read many current news articles on LGBT issues, they were usually negative-reporting on anti-LGBT sermons, harassment, or arrests of LGBT people. While these sources were important to understanding the public perception of *lesbi* lives, they were not reliable for learning about LGBT experiences. It was thus crucial to me to hear from *lesbi* themselves. Unfortunately, this was not an easy thing to do. Being homosexual is so stigmatized and women's sexuality is considered such a private matter, that it took until the fourth week of the Independent Study Period to meet a Balinese *lesbi* in person. Once I talked to *lesbi*, I wanted to be as ethical as possible in respecting their privacy. Many LGBT people I interviewed for this project were out to their communities, but for those who were not, I was careful to be selective in the places we talked and change names for the writing if needed. Sharing about my own life and identity was one of the ways in which I hoped to make informants feel more comfortable sharing personal stories or opinions. It was special to me that I could speak to people as another member of the LGBT community, even if our experiences and cultural understandings of gender and sexuality were vastly different. Rather than pollute an academic paper as no longer objective, I believe sharing my experiences, talking about girls, and asking about how to be masculine here were ways of connecting and learning. I hope that in my process of learning from Indonesian *lesbi*'s lives, they gained things from me as well; broadening all of our understandings of our countries as well as our identities.

PROFILE OF A *LESBI* COMMUNITY

I begin this paper with an ethnographic description of a night spent with one of the few Indonesian *lesbi* I was able to interact with. Many of the themes that arise or are observed in this glimpse of Ogut's life will be revisited and analyzed later on.

Ogut (38) was waiting to pick me up outside a busy mall in Denpasar, and I was scanning the street, baffled as to how I could recognize someone I hadn't met yet. A person with a short, spiky haircut atop a particularly sporty looking motorbike eventually started waving excitedly. Ogut was smiling wide and gave me a firm handshake as I climbed on the bike. He was confident and friendly, and as we wound through the small *gangs* (allies) to get to his place, I was nervous and excited meeting my first Indonesian *lesbi*. Ogut would graciously show me his friends, and family, whose existence is a public secret, and call me "*cowok*" for the night- I was entering his *dunia laki-laki* (men's world).

Though Ogut and I made it through the prepared list of interview questions, most of our time together felt more like the nature of friends. As I asked a question, his girlfriend's younger brother would prompt me with another glass of coke and *arak*, and we finally ended the questioning to sing karaoke together. For the next few hours, people would stop by Ogut's open porch to join in for a song or a chat. He told me all of these visitors were either *lesbi* or gay as well, and that they were all "like family." His place was the social hub for the neighborhood, and he proudly told me, "everyone hangs out here, we don't travel."⁵ Ogut, the younger brother Ketut, another gay young man Wayan, and I sang karaoke, listened to rock music, smoked cigarettes, and sipped *arak* together for hours. It was shocking for me- I had never been in this space before and had only seen young boys hanging out like this from a distance. It took me a while to understand that I was accepted as a boy in this space. We will see how Ogut identifies as

⁵ Ogut, personal communication (pc), 25 November 2018.

a *buc*, a *cowok*, and saw me as the same. Therefore, we were in his *dunia laki-laki*, or boy's world. Evelyn Blackwood uses this term to describe masculine spaces in her research with *tombois* in West Sumatra. She points out how *tombois*, just like Ogut, have the "same privileges" as brothers or boys in their life, such as "drinking, smoking, staying out late without supervision."⁶ Participating in these activities that are coded as masculine confirms their gender for others and sends a message: 'I am male.'

This message is not always noticed or respected, however. Ogut pointed out that the hardest part about being *buc* was the discrimination. One space that is especially difficult for him to move through is restrooms. He no longer tries to use the women's bathroom anymore, because too many times he was asked to leave. Women would be upset that he was there, and point the way to the men's restroom. Ogut was frustrated, as he was only trying to be respectful in using the restroom that corresponded to his biology. After being kicked out so many times however, he decided to only use the men's, and according to him, no one notices. Though he presents and identifies as a man, navigating in a society that only recognizes two genders according to biology is still difficult.

Besides spending time with friends at home, Ogut likes to do martial arts, sports, and fitness. He regrets that he can't do these more often these days, as he is busy working at a well-known apparel company in Kuta. At the same time however, he loves the place he works and has a great sense of pride about earning money and being financially independent. In fact, he told me his favorite thing about being a *buc* was that, "I feel strong. I feel like a father. I feel responsible. I don't like to ask for things from people, but I like to give."⁷ His identity as a *buc* allows him to access this independent, caretaking role of "*kebakapan*." Before Ogut had this settled life

⁶ Evelyn Blackwood, "Globalization, Sexuality, and Silences: Women's Sexualities and Masculinities in an Asian context," in *Women's Sexualities and Masculinities in a Globalizing Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁷ Ogut, personal communication (pc), 25 November 2018.

however, establishing work and the ability to take care of himself along was what enabled him to be open to his family.

Though Ogut's identity had not exactly been hidden from his family, he only came out to them "after I work." He remembered that "my family has noticed I was different since I was 7 years old. They ask me to get dressed up like a girl, I say "no! I am a boy." Ogut has thus always had a sense of his gender, and even said that he felt like a boy before he was born. His family had been expecting a baby boy, but he was born a girl. While he was sure about his maleness his whole life, Ogut only learned the word *lesbi* when he was 16. At that time, life was difficult because his family was insistent that he was a girl, and thus should date boys. Ogut tried to convince them that he was interested in girls, but his family was angry and confused. It was only after he left home that they stopped trying to force femininity and heterosexuality: "after I work, I earn money and become independent, and they give up, they think it's meant to be." Being able to support himself alone not only helps confirm Ogut's masculinity to others, it enables him to live the life he wants to, with the person he wants to, without interference from his family.

Now that he has been living on his own, Ogut is completely out in most contexts of his life. He wears men's *pakaian adat* to temple, dresses as a man at work and at home, and, most significantly, is the head of Srikandi Dewata. Srikandi Dewata is the organization for *lesbi* in the Denpasar and Kuta area, and was founded by Ogut and his friend Jo. They realized they were "in the same boat," and both wanted to help their friends and community. Now, Srikandi Dewata meets at least once a month to chat, hang out, and do community service. Though Ogut knows their funds are small, giving back is very important for him: "it is not about the amount, it is about the intention." The group is organized, very close, and has only two rules: drugs are forbidden, as is dating the same woman as another member. It holds an important space for *lesbi*

who have almost no other public resources or organizations to meet, educate themselves, or have a sense of group identity.

Notably, only one staff member at Gaya Dewata, an LGBT advocacy and HIV outreach organization in Denpasar, had ever heard of Srikandi Dewata, and he had assumed it died many years ago. Since so many members of the group are not open about their sexuality to anyone else in their life besides Srikandi, the organization must be quiet about its existence and its membership. While this makes it difficult for new members or the broader LGBT community to find them, respecting the privacy of its members is paramount. Ogut is proud of this community he helped create, and it is inspiring to see a community that remains strong in the face of intolerance.

After hearing and observing so much about Ogut's freedom and leadership, learning about his girlfriend opened a completely new perspective on *lesbi* lives. The two met in their village in Karang Asam, and Ogut described their connection as "like a magnet." According to him, it is difficult to tell whether girls are *lesbi* or not, and in fact his girlfriend Dewi had never been attracted to another *lesbi* before. Now however, they have moved to Denpasar and lived together for nine years. Her family knows about their relationship and is okay with it as long as Ogut "does not hurt her feelings and must love her." Dewi's little brother, in fact, was currently renting a room from them and socialized with us all evening.

In what seems like a very happy life together, there is one major looming problem. With a straight face and serious tone, Ogut told me, "My partner is going to get married. I don't mind, it's her right. But she hasn't found her soulmate yet. But definitely she will get married. Maybe that's the end of our soulmate." He seemed ambivalent about this, as if he were accepting an inevitable. For his girlfriend, the fact that she is *fem*, or feminine looking, means that her family

is still expecting her to get married. For now, their desire to uphold tradition does not mean they cannot accept her relationship with Ogut. Though her marriage will mark the end of their relationship, tradition does not mean automatic intolerance for her parents. Ogut continued to explain that although many *lesbi* he knows continue to meet and have relationships with other women even if they are married to a man, he does not want to do this. Though I would imagine it would be difficult to do this, he insisted “If she gets married, I don’t want to continue a relationship with her. I feel bad. If she is probably happy, let her be happy. Let her have her own life-it is not good for her husband.” Ogut recognizes the importance of marriage enough to understand Dewi’s family’s pressure. He wants his girlfriend to have the opportunity to follow societal expectations, perhaps in part because he understands this may not be possible for him. It would be explained to me later that there is a large gap between expectations for *buc* and those for *fems*.

When Ogut said that the members of Srikandi Dewata were all like family, he meant it. Throughout the night, many people stopped by Ogut’s porch for a chat. A group of four older *lesbi*, two *buc* and two *fem*, were the chattiest visitors. One *buc* Wayan, whom Ogut called “*bapak*,” pulled me aside and gave me an overview of their community, and common problems many of them face.⁸ Wayan explained they were the “advisor” of the *lesbi* community here, and often gave advice or solutions to problems of the younger couples. They are now retired, but has been working in the *lesbi* community for a long time. In fact, they were a part of founding Lembaiyung Dewata, the *lesbi* organization in Lovina, Singaraja in 1991.

Wayan gave me insight into the complicated lives of older *lesbi*, as well as the difficulties *fems* face. First, they told me the story of the older couple sitting next to us: “She has two

⁸ I do not know this person’s name, nor what pronouns they use. I will thus refer to them as Wayan, as a gender-neutral name, and use “they/them” pronouns

children, her husband died. Then she met a *buc* who cares for and loves her, and finally they date. There are a lot of women who become lesbian because of a failed marriage. Finally they become *lesbi*.” The women are still *tertutup*, or closed, to their children and families, but found the time and access to be together after the fem’s husband died. They both jokingly shushed me when I asked if they were *lesbi*, laughing and saying their relationship was a “public secret.”

According to Wayan, many women enter *lesbi* relationships after experience with “broken homes” or failed marriages. They also told me about the obligation for *fems* to get married. For a *fem*, they say, “*Fem* has to get married. *Buci* don’t have to get married because they are not considered normal. But if the *fem* is a lesbian, it is considered to be normal because there is a possibility that they get married.” This is mainly due to appearance. Since *fems* can look like “normal,” or like heterosexual women according to standards of femininity in Indonesia, they are still assumed to be eligible for marriage by men or their families. *Buc*, on the other hand, are not always visibly identifiable as women, and thus are not expected to get married. Wayan says that because of this, *fems* are only able to be in the *lesbi* community for a short time, then are usually forced to get married. They recounted a relationship with a *fem* that only lasted one year before she got engaged. Wayan was very sad about it, but accepted this is what would happen. Now, they have a long-term girlfriend who is a part of the Srikandi Dewata community, and seems very happy to be the older, wiser “*bapak*” of the neighborhood.

Wayan and their friends all smiled and laughed at my young, boyish appearance. They corrected me when I said *cantik*, and instead taught me words for handsome: *tampan* and *ganteng*. Though I was not entirely ready or comfortable being seen as a boy, or *cowok*, it felt comforting to be in a space that recognized my *bucness*, and accepted me for it. I told Wayan how much I wished I had a person like them in my life, to share their life stories, knowledge, and

guide me. With a gentle nudge and a sincere smile, Wayan ushered me back to the porch, "Makan dulu." From Ogut, to Dewi and Wayan, the small glimpse of the Denpasar *lesbi* community I had that night was exciting and humbling. I had so many stories to learn from, and was so grateful I had been allowed to share some of my own as well.

CURRENT CONTEXT AND PERCEPTION OF LGBT

Before covering the current perception of the LGBT community and *lesbi* in Indonesia, the unique historical and political moment the nation is in must be taken into account. According to Dede Oetomo, Indonesia's first major LGBT and HIV/AIDS activist, intolerance of non-normative sexualities "has just exploded" in recent years.⁹ Two reasons he believes this may be happening is the systematic enforcement of the heterosexual nuclear family by the New Order government, as well as an increase of LGBT voices organizing to demand legal recognition and civil rights.¹⁰ The upcoming elections of 2019 are also widely known to be catalysts for intensified political stances that spark more vocal instances of intolerance. Beau, an Australian working for Gaya Dewata, spoke confidently that four years ago when he started working at the organization, "it was much easier to be gay in Bali."¹¹ From historical evidence, media coverage of the LGBT community in Indonesia supports this opinion. In 1981 for example, *Liberty* magazine covered a wedding between two *lesbi* named Bonnie and Jossie in Jakarta. While the article was not wholly supportive of homosexuality in Indonesia, its author was well attuned to the potential for major social changes occurring in the near future. The reporter writes of the

⁹ "Q & A: Dede Oetomo on the the LGBT Panic," *Indonesia at Melbourne*, 17 March, 2016.

¹⁰ First, he points out there has been a continuation of the Indonesian state encouraging the separate spheres for men and women, or husbands and wives. This is done both by the parallel wives' organizations for high-level civil servants such as Dharma Wanita, and by an intense promotion of family life as an Indonesian citizen's primary duty. Oetomo cites Julia Suryakusuma's theory of "State Ibuism" to capture this idea.

¹¹ Beau, personal communication (pc), 7 November 2018.

couple, “In our estimation, both of them want to become pioneers for their people, who are not small in number. And with them both standing in front, their hopes openly revealed, who knows what will happen.”¹² The tone here is optimistic, something that unfortunately cannot be said of the current media coverage of Indonesia’s LGBT community. Jovand, a transman I spoke to, echoed these sentiments: “In Bali, LGBT used to be not free, but safe. We don’t get any intimidation from this, that. Because there’s a movement against LGBT in Jakarta, then people are worried about it.”¹³

The movement in Jakarta Jovand is referring to is the increase of politicians publicly condemning non-heteronormative sexuality and gender identities. Just a week before this paper was written for example, the mayor of Padang, West Sumatra led a crowd of thousands in a rally to promote a “Vice-Free Padang.” Protestors were seen carrying signs reading “Save Padang from LGBT” among other intolerant rhetoric.¹⁴ This public demonstration of homophobia is the latest in a string of events across Sumatra and Jawa that are openly anti-LGBT.¹⁵ Mayors and police forces are often involved in these events, and many believe the pressure of appearing tough on social issues before the spring elections is a large factor in these demonstrations. It is clear that these rallies will change the mainstream understanding of sexuality permanently, as these intolerant campaigns may be the first time many Indonesians are exposed to the specific vocabulary of “LGBT.”¹⁶ Thus, the lives of many members of the archipelago’s LGBT community are in a crucial moment of change. While this means that issues of tolerance and

¹² Tom Boellstroff, “Gay and Lesbi Subjectives, National Belonging and the New Indonesia” from *Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity, and Development* (Singapore, Institute of SE Asian Studies): 2002.

¹³ Jovand, personal communication (pc), 30 October 2018.

¹⁴ “Mayor of Padang Leads Thousands in Anti-LGBT Declaration March,” *Coconut Jakarta* 19 November, 2018.

¹⁵ The mayors of Bogor and Payakumbuh also led their towns in anti-LGBT marches this November, signifying state-sanctioned intolerance in each of these regions.

¹⁶ Made Yudiana, personal communication (pc), 28 November 2018

sexual identity are especially vulnerable right now, it is also an especially salient time for study and engagement with the Indonesian LGBT community.

In terms of the LGBT community's civil rights, the legal grounds for protection are unclear. Technically non-heterosexual identities are not illegal, but they are also not recognized by the Indonesian government. Just this April, a bill criminalizing homosexuality was narrowly blocked, but only temporarily. It is scheduled to be revisited by the state when other controversial topics in the bill are sorted out, meaning the threat of illegality is still looming.¹⁷ The consequences of this precarious legal position are immense- many people I spoke to believed being LGBT was already illegal. It is true that the regions of Aceh, Padang, and Pariaman have explicit anti-homosexuality laws, but the rest of the nation does not have any criminalizing stance on sexuality.¹⁸ There is much confusion in Indonesia about the legal status of homosexuality, in part due to just how vocally intolerant the government has been recently.

When it comes to *lesbi*, the major theme in terms of public perception is invisibility. During the Independent Study Project timeframe, it took until the fourth and final week to finally meet a *lesbi* in person. I found that while most people I talked to recognize the words *lesbi* or *tomboi*, no one outside of the LGBT community had ever met or knew a woman who pursued relationships with other women. "They exist" was a common response from informants when asked if they knew a *lesbi*. While there is much mainstream literature, bars or clubs, and even slang relating to gay men and *waria*, almost none of these exist for *lesbi*. The first and most important lesson of researching female sexuality was taking into account the specific distinction between visibility of the male and *waria* communities, and the visibility of *lesbi*.

¹⁷ Kyle Knight, "Indonesia's Anti-LGBT Drive Should Concern all Asia," Feb. 20, 2018, humanrightswatch.org

¹⁸ Josh Jackman, "An Indonesian City has Banned Gay Sex to 'Eradicate LGBT'" *Pink News* 30 November, 2018.

For those I interviewed who did know who *lesbi* were, there was confusion about the reality of their lives as well as about sexual orientation in general. Astri, a heterosexual woman who works as an assistant manager at Gaya Dewata, told me that before she began working at an HIV prevention organization, that she had only heard of *waria*. Learning of gay men and *lesbi* was recent.¹⁹ After we had been talking for some time, she returned to the question of why she only knew one *lesbi*. She said she had never realized how small the *lesbi* community was, musing “I just realized, very very very small.”²⁰ Even for someone who worked in an office full of gay men and *waria*, knowledge of *lesbi* lives was extremely limited.

For young university students at Hindu Dharma Institute of Negeri Denpasar (IHDN), information about *lesbi* was even harder to come by. As I interviewed multiple groups of three to five female students, most of my questions were met with giggles or silence- it was clear that talking about the LGBT community was taboo for them. Their eventual responses indicated an awareness of the difficult double lives many LGBT people lead here, but not all were especially tolerant. A few of the students said about *lesbi*: “it’s okay” and “of course,” while others in the same group told me being gay was “not normal,” and that many people see it as a *dosa*, or sin. According to them, homosexuality was considered a sin by all religions because it was “*tidak alami*,” or against nature. A student from another group told me that some people believe LGBT is *penyakit*, or a sickness, and that they are controlled by evil spirits. When pushed farther, she did not know why- and only replied “I don’t know, they just believe like that.”²¹ A pattern among the *mahasiswa* was believing LGBT is against religion, but confusion about where or why. There was a range of opinions on the morality or tolerance of other sexual orientations, but

¹⁹ Astri, personal communication (pc), 14 November 2018.

²⁰ Astri, personal communication (pc), 14 November 2018.

²¹ Mega, personal communication (pc), 25 October 2018.

the young students' confusion and ignorance was not encouraging for more accepting change in the future.

Within the LGBT community, engagement or inclusion with *lesbi* is almost non-existent. I was originally referred to Yayasan Gaya Dewata in Denpasar as a resource for meeting and learning about the LGBT community in Bali, but quickly learned that women are not involved in the organization at all. Gaya Dewata's main programming focuses on prevention of HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections, and for this the most high risk demographic is gay men and *waria*. There is thus no outreach programming, group discussions, or counseling support provided for *lesbi* or transmen at Gaya Dewata. Reasoning for this lack of representation varied. Astri attributed the absence of *lesbi* to differences in character between men and women: "Because women are more shy and they don't want others to know their sexuality, they are hiding. It's different than gay men."²² The perception that *lesbi* were much less willing to open up about their sexuality was repeated by Jasmine, the director at Gaya Dewata's partner organization Warga in Singaraja. She told me that *lesbi* are "not yet brave" enough to be open with their families or community. Though a veteran of the transgender community in North Bali, Jasmine did not know about any organization or activities of local *lesbi*, and mused, "We never asked them why don't you want to get together with us."²³ There is thus a sense of separation and confusion surrounding women of the LGBT community even within spaces that are welcoming. This confusion is not accidental ignorance or an unwillingness to learn, but an extension of how separate male and female worlds can be in Balinese culture. Beau explained this by saying queer worlds in Indonesia are "very firmly apart. You'll find that most gay men

²² Astri, personal communication (pc), 14 November 2018.

²³ Jasmine, personal communication (pc), 9 November 2018.

have never met a lesbian in their lives.”²⁴ Once again I was reminded that the invisibility of *lesbi* is unique from the difficulties that face gay men and *waria*.

Though gay women and transmen may for the most part be invisible to the public and LGBT community, they are still extremely vulnerable to discrimination and persecution. In just one month, there were two arrests of a combined 12 *lesbi* in West Sumatra by the Satpol PP, or Civil Service Police. Both arrests were described as “raids” by the Satpol PP and took place in public spaces- the first in the women’s boarding houses and the second in a cafe. After their arrests, the women were taken to the region’s Social Services Office.²⁵ There, Jovand explained that “they will give you some advice, a recommendation not to be LGBT. It’s like being quarantined.”²⁶ The head of the Satpol PP described this in different terms: “As follow up, we will send the 10 women to the Social Services Office so that they can receive guidance, and we hope that society will cooperate in safeguarding the social interactions of our children. Because it is the people they are associating with that influence the attitudes and mentality of our children.”²⁷ *Lesbi* are thought to have negative, immoral impacts not only on their own lives, but on the lives of those around them. They are clearly considered to be a threat to society, even as their visible presence in public is almost non-existent and misunderstood.

Public perception of *lesbi* lives is thus complex. While it is extremely difficult to find any *lesbi* or recognize representation of female sexuality even within the LGBT community, another recurring pattern from the media is a fascination with causes of homosexuality in women. In news articles covering the two recent arrests of *lesbi* in Padang, there were lengthy sections in

²⁴ Beau, personal communication (pc), 7 November 2018.

²⁵ “LGBT Couple Raided in Padang: This is their Recognition why they Choose to be Lesbian,” *Tribunnews* 18 November 2018.

²⁶ Jovand, personal communication (pc), 30 October 2018.

²⁷ “Indonesian Police Arrest Ten 'Suspected Lesbians' after Photo of Kiss Posted Facebook” *Detik News*, 5 November 2018.

which authors or “experts” such as psychologists explained reasons why homosexual attraction could occur. In fact, the subtitle of one article read: “Why They Choose to be Lesbian.”²⁸ These sections make claims based on stereotypes, and are also not scientifically reputable. A Forensic Clinical Psychologist, for example, explained to Tribunnews in November that there are four major reasons a woman would “like their fellow kind:” chromosomes, hormones, “learning process,” and trauma. She explained that XXY chromosomes would result in a “masculine element” that could lead to same-sex desire. Similarly, an unusually high level of testosterone would produce a female brain that is “more like the structure of male thinking.”²⁹ What is notable about these first two factors is their scientific inaccuracy and reiteration of a binary model of desire. Chromosomal differences can result in intersex individuals, but this physiology has no direct link to same-sex desire or attraction. Similarly, the long-held cultural assumption of a link between testosterone and increased sexual drive has been disproven, meaning that varying testosterone levels in women have little effect on their sexual habits.³⁰ One reason why psychologists as well as the media may stand by these erroneous claims is that they uphold a binary model of sexual activity. In Indonesia’s extremely heteronormative climate, lesbianism is understood by some as women acting ‘like men’ in their desire for other women. This belief frames lesbian desire as a ‘bad copy’ of male heterosexuality and denies the fact that women can have sexual preferences outside of men.

The third and fourth factors are not focused on biology, but still contain large generalizations. Psychologist Kasandra Putranto identified these potential reasons for homosexuality as the “learning process” and past trauma. The first is based on an assumption

²⁸ “LGBT Couple Raided in Padang: This is their Recognition why they Choose to be Lesbian”

²⁹ Astari Pinasthika Sarosa, “Psychologist Explains Because Women Can Like Fellow Kind,” *Tempo*, 7 April 2018.

³⁰ Rosemary Bason, Lori Brotto, John Petkau, Fernand Labrie, “Role of Androgens in Women’s Sexual Dysfunction” *Menopause* 17 no. 5 (Sep-Oct 2010): 962-971.

that homosexual behavior can be learned or picked up on if one's social surroundings present it in a positive light. In an article reporting on one of the recent arrests of two *lesbi* in Padang, the author describes this idea as the "environmental factor:" "Besides, it is an environmental factor when someone associates with a community or a *lesbi* friend and finds comfort, it is most likely to be contagious."³¹ Describing sexuality as "contagious" is grossly inaccurate, though it is true that one's cultural understandings of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors does inform one's self-acceptance and awareness of non heterosexual possibilities. More often than not, the idea that homosexuality is contagious has been used historically as a tool to justify and encourage discrimination, and is thus a dangerous falsehood to propagate. The last factor, trauma, is another common misunderstanding about homosexual behavior. While it may be true for some that bad experiences with the opposite sex encouraged them to seek a relationship with someone of the same sex, it is a sweeping generalization that many in the LGBT community do not identify with. What these last two factors problematically assume is that something out of the ordinary must have happened in one's life in order for them to desire someone of the same sex. From my own experience and accounts of *lesbi* in Bali, this is simply untrue.

What is so unsettling about these sweeping generalizations, besides their inaccuracy, is that there is no other information in these articles about the women's lives besides their speculation on the origins of their sexual orientation. There is a public curiosity about the basic origin of homosexuality that reflects the Indonesian public's general ignorance on different sexual orientations. At the same time that there is a fascination to learn about sexuality, homosexuality continues to be persecuted and stigmatized. It was shocking for me to read an explanation of lesbian desire in the same article describing an arrest of women for identifying as lesbians. Even before their identities are understood, they are punished for them. It is true that

³¹ "This is the Role of Buci and Femi in Similar Romance," *Tribunnews* 22 December, 2013.

there are many more derogatory beliefs about the origin of homosexuality in Indonesia. None of the articles, for example, explained same-sex desire as a *penyakit*, or sickness- something I have heard from multiple people interviewed. Though it is fortunate that these extremely hurtful things are not being used as frequently in the mass media, propagating the inaccurate and stereotypical factors of homosexuality we have examined is still dangerous and is unhelpful for those seeking reliable information about sexuality.

WHY SO INVISIBLE?

“There are two types of gays: visible and invisible” -Jasmine at Wargas, Singaraja

The lack of a *lesbi* public presence is a complicated issue to attempt to unpack. Ideally, I would be able to draw conclusions on this from *lesbi* themselves, but as an outsider, it was difficult for me to access spaces to meet people and ask them to open up about difficult topics. What is clear is that their invisibility is not always due to a lack of personal agency. *Lesbi* must balance their own emotional and physical well-being as well as familial and community relationships with their identities, and thus many fluid dynamics arise. While I am drawing these conclusions, it is important to keep in mind that this is one perspective of many, based on Balinese-specific and time limited observations.

As mentioned before, many in the GBT community believe women are more reluctant to come out to their communities, and are thus less visible because they are “*belum berani*” (not yet brave).³² One hole in this logic however, is that I have met many others involved in the gay male community who are also not open about their sexuality to their families. Though wanting to keep

³² Jasmine, personal communication (pc), 9 November, 2018.

their identities a secret is an unavoidable factor in *lesbi*'s low visibility, there are also multiple other social factors that can give a more nuanced look at the difficulties facing women that affect their ability to participate in the broader Balinese LGBT community.

First, social gender expectations make it more difficult for women to have the double life that many closeted gay men do. While some employees of Gaya Dewata can do this work and tell their parents a different story about their occupations, Beau believed women would face more scrutiny. According to his observations, "parents care more about where their daughters are, where they're going than they do about their sons."³³ They also may have less access to time and mobility, making it difficult to participate in outside communities such as Srikandi Dewata or Gaya Dewata.

Secondly, marriage is the looming hurdle in most every LGBT person's life. While I have talked to a trans man and *lesbi* who have been able to remain with their girlfriends unmarried, it is such a central facet of heterosexual Balinese life that it is difficult to ignore at least the pressure from family or friends to get married and begin a family. It is important to note that this pressure can begin much younger for girls. The 1974 Marriage Law, for example, allows girls to get married at 16 with parental permission, while the minimum age for boys is 19.³⁴ Since sexuality is something that changes throughout one's life and can be difficult to understand when young, girls may miss significant time to explore their identity and desires if there is pressure to marry at a younger age.

Furthermore, once married a woman has a daunting new set of responsibilities and tasks. Astri and her friend Dia, a worker for the Denpasar AIDS Commission, described the pressure on a wife to get her own education, work, take care of children, take care of her new husband's

³³ Beau, personal communication (pc), 7 November, 2018.

³⁴ Andreas Harsono "Indonesian President Jokowi to Ban Child Marriage," *Human Rights Watch*, 23 April 2018.

family, and prepare for all religious ceremonies. The role of wifedom is so ingrained in what it means to be female that Dia concluded, “It’s so much pressure to become a wife in Bali, to become a woman in Bali because all of the responsibilities are on them.”³⁵ It is important to highlight that Dia is equating womanhood with being a wife here. Far from being an exaggeration of social norms, this understanding of gender is also propagated by the Indonesian state. For example, the *Panca Dharma Wanita*, or Women's Five Duties, is a set of values written and dispensed under the New Order government describing the ideal roles of every woman. A poster on these five responsibilities is hung in every village head's office, and I have noticed one hanging above my Ibu's kitchen doorway in Kerambitan as well. They state clearly that the roles of a woman are: “(1) to support her husband’s career and duties; (2) provide offspring; (3) care for and rear the children; (4) be a good housekeeper; and (5) be a guardian of the community.”³⁶ When supported by the state itself, being a mother can be understood as a national duty, or the duty of a citizen. Thus, *lesbi* who do not wish to marry or raise children are facing a great hurdle, and at worst may be seen as going against their government.

Though marriage does mean increased responsibilities on the new wife, it is also culturally understood as a requirement for women to be taken care of. Dia stated bluntly that “If you’re not married, especially if you are a woman, you have nothing.” She continued to elaborate, “Because in your family if you have a sister and brother, brothers have the responsibility for a woman who is not married... If a woman is married, responsibility for her moves to her husband, not with her parents anymore.”³⁷ The shifting responsibility for a woman throughout her life shows that women are not commonly expected to be economically or socially

³⁵ Dia, personal communication (pc), 9 November, 2018.

³⁶ Tom Boellstroff, “Gay and Lesbi Subjectives, National Belonging and the New Indonesia” in *Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity, Development* (Singapore, Institute of SE Asian Studies): 2002.

³⁷ Dia, personal communication (pc), 9 November, 2018.

independent. This is intensified at the end of one's life: if a woman has no children, there will be no one to take care of her when she is elderly. Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead argue that one theme of gendered power imbalances across cultures is that women are often defined relationally to men. While in many cultures, tropes of masculinity such as 'warrior,' 'elder,' or 'statesman' are individualistic, "Women do not exist in their own right, but in relation to something or somebody" as 'wife,' 'mother,' or 'daughter.'³⁸ Though this is true to varying degrees according to time period, ethnicity, and class of an individual, noticing the prevalence of women defined relationally to the men in her life makes it clear how a same-sex relationship would completely disrupt this understanding of gender roles.

Besides these logistic difficulties, remaining unmarried to a man may produce a significant emotional strain as well. Jasmine, the director of *Wargas* in Singaraja, empathized with those who only pursue their same-sex interests outside of the home, even if married. She could understand why gay men and women might get married to a heterosexual partner because it allows them to conform to societal expectations: "Thank god you have offspring, unlike me. Because you have a better life, in terms of acceptance to the community."³⁹ The inability for *lesbi* to marry legally, or for their partnerships to be a part of a public social community makes it extremely difficult for these relationships to be visible, and may result in a sense of isolation.

A third social factor in the way of *lesbi* visibility is the lack of places for them to gather as a community. Dia described this as a specific difference between *lesbi*, and gay men or *waria*: "there are no hotspots like there are for gay men."⁴⁰ There are multiple bars on the West coast of Bali near Kuta and Seminyak that are known as and advertised as "gay bars," but after visiting

³⁸ Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead "Introduction" in *Sexual Meanings* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press): 1981.

³⁹ Jasmine, personal communication (pc), 10 November, 2018.

⁴⁰ Dia, personal communication (pc), 9 November, 2018.

them, it was clear that they served a majority male and transgender women clientele only. Ogut, for example, described a popular gay bar Mixwell as “a place for *waria* who like to dance.”⁴¹ Participant observation at the bar confirmed Ogut’s generalization. By its peak hours, Mixwell was packed with gay men and *waria*- both Indonesian and tourists. The crowd cheered along and danced to the blasting music of their drag show, and absolutely ate up the interludes of almost-naked, muscular men who danced on the bar between numbers. Clearly the night’s lineup was geared towards those interested in other men. Even so, drag queens and gay men assured us that *lesbi* also come here, and would point out at the crowd as they spoke. From what we could observe however, there were almost no Indonesian cisgendered women present. Gay bars are a place of community and connection in many cultural contexts, and can be especially valuable if there are few other public spaces available to meet. *Lesbi* continue to be invisible even in this space designated for the LGBT community, in part perhaps because it was frequented and catered towards gay men and *waria* almost exclusively.

Lastly, Dia pointed out that the *lesbi* community is invisible on an institutional level. While data for the broader LGBT community in Indonesia is lacking, the state does put in effort to prevent HIV, and thus keeps statistics on gay men and *waria* who are affected. She explained this by saying, “because they think that risk of HIV is more in gay men, in gay women less risk of HIV, so they do not collect data for gay woman.”⁴² This only confirms the lack of recognition of gay women and their sexual activity. Furthermore, organizations like Gaya Dewata receive funding mostly for HIV prevention and education, as LGBT advocacy is too controversial to be publicly supported. This means that although their outreach workers are in the community every

⁴¹ Ogut, personal communication (pc), 25 November, 2018.

⁴² Dia, personal communication (pc), 9 November, 2018.

day with positive messages about the LGBT community, they are not looking for women and rarely connect with *lesbi*.

MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF INVISIBILITY

The theme of invisibility for *lesbi* in Bali is much more complicated than a question of whether they are “out” or not. While the terms *terbuka* (open) and *tertutup* (closed) are used to describe each individual’s degree of openness with their identity, there are many different spheres in which *lesbi* traverse between openness and following normative expectations of sexuality. Many members of Srikandi Dewata, for example, are consistently engaged with that *lesbi* community while keeping their identities a secret in all other spaces.⁴³ Similarly, multiple staff members at Gaya Dewata work professionally as advocates for the LGBT community, but tell their family they work in the tourist industry to avoid disclosing their sexual identity. Invisibility is thus a flexible trait for many LGBT Balinese. Jon Binnie writes that in the dominant Western narrative of queerness, “coming out of the closet” is not a value-neutral moment, but the beginning of one’s “liberated queer identity.”⁴⁴ In an American context, being in the closet is seen as a stage that one should move on from as soon as possible in order to fully realize their individual identity. Indonesian social norms however, challenge this view of the closet. Being *tertutup* does not always reflect one’s confidence or certainty in their identity. Instead, managing when and where one’s sexual identity is revealed is often about the practicality of maintaining relationships with family or community. Older *lesbi* in Ogut’s neighborhood have successfully maintained a relationship for 25 years while being *tertutup* to

⁴³ Ogut, personal communication (pc), 25 November, 2018.

⁴⁴ Jon Binnie, *The Globalization of Sexuality* (Sage Publications): 2004.

their children.⁴⁵ Their lack of openness with their children does not at all invalidate their committed relationships or identities, but is their method of maintaining familial as well as romantic relationships.

Ayu, a *lesbi* I met in a bar in Lovina, Singaraja, also expressed her sexual identity outside of the family. When her father died however, there was no longer any pressure for her to marry a man, and thus told me “I am free now.”⁴⁶ She is still *tertutup* in public and to her mother, but visits other *lesbi* in Kuta frequently and is now 28 without any intention of marrying in the future. Blackwood uses American queer theorist Jose Quiroga’s ideas on Latino queers to analyze *tomboi* and *lesbi*’s varying degrees of openness in different sphere of their life: “circuitness, evasion, and avoidance, which *tombois* evidence by avoiding certain masculine behaviors in front of family, are not necessarily forms of denial, but particular ways of saying something.”⁴⁷ Indonesian *lesbi* expressing openness in selective spaces challenges the Western notion of being out as a permanent identity. *Lesbi* wielding control over when and to whom they are out as homosexual is one way to preserve positive relationships with family members, neighbors, or protect themselves generally from a society that is often intolerant of their sexual and gender identities.

Invisibility can also provide space for same-sex relationships and expression in a counter-intuitive way. For *lesbi* or *tombois* who present visually in a masculine way, assumptions that they are still straight women can allow them to enter spaces that heterosexual men would not be allowed. Since sexual desire for women is something only assumed to be for the purpose of having children within a heterosexual marriage, many *lesbi* are easily misread as heterosexual.

⁴⁵ Ogut, personal communication (pc), 25 November, 2018.

⁴⁶ Ayu, personal communication (pc), 24 November, 2018.

⁴⁷ Evelyn Blackwood “Trans Identities and Contingent Masculinities: Being Tombois in Everyday Practice,” *Feminist Studies* 25 no. 3, (Fall 2009): 454-480.

This happens due to the common misconception that women are unable to have autonomous sexual desires that differ from this model.⁴⁸ This insight helped me understand how *lesbi* I met could be surprised when I revealed I was also a lesbian, even though in the United States my clothing and general appearance would be a strong and potentially obvious indicator of my queer identity. No matter how “masculine” or non-traditionally feminine a woman’s dress, many may assume “that’s just her style, it doesn’t mean she’s a *lesbi*” as IHDN students told me.⁴⁹

While these misreadings may be frustrating or invalidating for some who attempt to express their gender or sexuality a certain way, it also has the potential to provide a safety net. I have felt this frustration acutely, as my style expression helps me embody my identity as an androgynous queer woman. I have been reminded that this is a privilege however, and not at all necessary in order to be secure in a sexual identity. Evelyn Blackwood writes about these misunderstandings of appearance from the perspective of *tombois* in West Sumatra: “*Tombois*’ collusion with assumptions about women’s desires makes their own desires invisible, but this invisibility provides the space for *tombois* and their partners to create and maintain long-term relationships.”⁵⁰ Sleeping over with a significant other or being at her house without adult supervision, for example, are activities that would be deemed extremely inappropriate if one’s same-sex desire was known. Playing into ignorance of one’s sexuality then can be an opportunity to express these desires in spaces that would otherwise be intolerant.

⁴⁸ Evelyn Blackwood “Trans Identities and Contingent Masculinities: Being Tombois in Everyday Practice,” *Feminist Studies* 25 no. 3, (Fall 2009): 454-480.

⁴⁹ Mega, personal communication (pc), 25 October 2018.

⁵⁰ Evelyn Blackwood “Trans Identities and Contingent Masculinities: Being Tombois in Everyday Practice,” *Feminist Studies* 25 no. 3, (Fall 2009): 454-480.

CONCLUSIONS

Above all, the *lesbi* community is diverse, dynamic, and much more organized than outsiders assume. There is a broad range of identities that can fall under *lesbi*, as well as fluid uses of self-identification according to the space one is in. Being closed with one's identity can be a way to navigate family or community relationships that one does not want to endanger. While this may be emotionally challenging, there are also many ways that closed *lesbi* I spoke to found communities or spaces that were accessible to them. Gender identifications besides 'woman' are absolutely included in the *lesbi* community, as *buc* or *buci* is indicative of identity, not only style or visual appearance. This inclusion of non-binary gender identities has encouraged me to challenge the category "lesbian" in the United States in order for its understanding of gender to become broader.

Organizations like Srikandi Dewata and Lembaiyung Dewata remain secret hubs for *lesbi* even as other members of the LGBT community lost track of them years ago. The gay and *waria* communities and organizations were all absolutely welcoming, but were simply under informed about *lesbi* lives and why their organizations were less accessible to them. Even so, there is an empathetic understanding that everyone in the LGBT community is vulnerable. Recent arrests of *lesbi*, gay men, and *waria* show that no matter each subset's visibility, anti-LGBT fervor affects all.

Lack of visibility is an unavoidable conclusion, and can be understood in reference to the pressure of expectations of femininity, marriage, a lack of public *lesbi* spaces, and a lack of data on female sexuality. These factors are only some of the reasons I could observe and understand through my time in the field, and I would encourage future researchers to search for others.

Lesbi invisibility is real, but means many things for different people. For women like Ayu and the older couple in Ogut's neighborhood, public invisibility meant maintaining positive relationships with their families. For Ogut, he was not always in control of who saw or recognized his identity as *buc*, and thus had many difficulties in spaces such as bathrooms. Though only for a short period of time, I experienced how others could define one's identity based on appearance; either by assuming your gender, or erasing your sexual identity. It felt confusing and frustrating, but at times I was grateful for an assumption of heterosexuality, as I did not always want to be open with people I had never met before, or with those whom I was not sure would be accepting. *Lesbi* navigate these assumptions in many different spheres of their life in many different ways that I learned so much from.

The diversity, perseverance, creativity, and honesty of the *lesbi* community in Bali is something I am so very grateful to have been a part of, even if just briefly. The connections we could share were incredibly meaningful, and helped me transform difficult moments, misreadings of identity, and experiences with intolerance into growth and strength. The *lesbi* community has much to offer to not only academic, but social communities- inspiring all those they meet, as they have inspired me.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Any further study on female sexuality and *lesbi* positionality and experience would be incredibly productive for information on the LGBT community. There have not been enough studies that focus on female sexuality rather than LGBT in general, and so secondary sources, established resources, and data is very lacking.

Within the *lesbi* community, there is much to be learned about the overlaps between gender and sexual orientation identities. Some *buci* I met identified as men, while others did not. On the flip side, *fem* lives in the *lesbi* community are often defined by their feminine appearance, and thus pressure to conform to heterosexual standards. How *buc* and *fem* imagine and position themselves within these dynamics could be explored in much greater depth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Secondary Sources

- Bennie, Jon, *The Globalization of Sexuality* (Sage Publications): 2004.
- Blackwood, Evelyn, "Globalization, Sexuality, and Silences: Women's Sexualities and Masculinities in an Asian context," in *Women's Sexualities and Masculinities in a Globalizing Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
- Blackwood, Evelyn, "Trans Identities and Contingent Masculinities: Being Tombois in Everyday Practice," *Feminist Studies* 25 no. 3, (Fall 2009): 454-480.
- Boellstroff, Tom, "Gay and Lesbi Subjectives, National Belonging and the New Indonesia" in *Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity, Development* (Singapore, Institute of SE Asian Studies): 2002.
- Boellstroff, Tom, "Playing Back the Nation: Waria, Indonesian Transvestites" *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (2004): 159-195.
- Harsono, Andreas, "Indonesian President Jokowi to Ban Child Marriage," Human Rights Watch, 23 April 2018.
- Hidayana, Irwa Martua, "LGBT and Social Inclusion in Indonesia: What the Surveys Say?," *The Conversation*, 12 February, 2018.
- "Indonesian Police Arrest Ten 'Suspected Lesbians' after Photo of Kiss Posted Facebook" *Detik News*, 5 November 2018.
- Jackman, Josh, "An Indonesian City has Banned Gay Sex to 'Eradicate LGBT'" *Pink News* 30 November, 2018.
- Kyle, Knight, "Indonesia's Anti-LGBT Drive Should Concern all Asia," Feb. 20, 2018, humanrightswatch.org
- "LGBT Couple Raided in Padang: This is their Recognition why they Choose to be Lesbian," *Tribunnews* 18 November 2018.
- "Mayor of Padang Leads Thousands in Anti-LGBT Declaration March," *Coconut Jakarta* 19 November, 2018.
- Ortner, Sherry and Harriet Whitehead, "Introduction" in *Sexual Meanings* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press): 1981.
- Rosemary Bason, Lori Brotto, John Petkau, Fernand Labrie, "Role of Androgens in Women's Sexual Dysfunction" *Menopause* 17 no. 5 (Sep-Oct 2010): 962-971.
- Sarosa, Astari Pinasthika, "Psychologist Explains Because Women Can Like Fellow Kind," *Tempo*, 7 April 2018.

Sinnott, "Borders, Diaspora, and Regional Connections: Trends in Asian "Queer" Studies," 17.

"This is the Role of Buci and Femi in Similar Romance," *Tribunnews* 22 December, 2013.

"Q & A: Dede Oetomo on the the LGBT Panic," *Indonesia at Melbourne*, 17 March, 2016.

Primary Sources

Astri, personal communication (pc), 14 November 2018.

Ayu, personal communication (pc), 24 November, 2018.

Beau, personal communication (pc), 7 November 2018.

Dia, personal communication (pc), 9 November, 2018.

Jasmine, personal communication (pc), 10 November, 2018.

Made Yudiana, personal communication (pc), 28 November 2018.

Mega, personal communication (pc), 25 October 2018.

Ogut, personal communication (pc), 25 November, 2018.

Wayan, personal communication (pc), 25 November, 2018.