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### Indonesia's "Fresh Meat": LGBTQ Activism Amid Political Homophobia and Transphobia

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Indonesia's "Fresh Meat": LGBTQ Activism Amid Political Homophobia and Transphobia

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SIT Study Abroad Indonesia: Arts, Religion, and Social Change

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## Introduction

In 2016, Indonesia—the fourth most populous country in the world—received international attention for what the Human Rights Watch calls an LGBTQ “Crisis” (2016). Sparked by high ranking officials publicly declaring homophobic and transphobic sentiments, a wave of intolerance, fear, and hate disseminated throughout the country. Gender and sexual minorities became “fresh meat” for political players—government officials, military leaders, religious figures, and other social agents competed to take a stand against an “impeding” LGBTQ threat.<sup>1</sup> These dialogues catalyzed into action as zealous anti-LGBTQ campaigns staked violence and discrimination against gender and sexual minorities across Indonesia.

The “Crisis of 2016” cannot be understood as a resentful reaction to a movement ostentatiously claiming space. Homophobia and transphobia have long been slowly encroaching on the larger hetero- and cisnormative society, especially through private and localized manners (Boellstorff, 2004). Dwelling in this environment, the “threatening” LGBTQ movement has struggled to gain basic groundings, and thus hardly qualifies as a challenger to state power in its societal influence. 2016, then, may be understood as a political gambit to strategically frame a vulnerable, and thus, marketable, minority rights movement. In this political ploy to name the LGBTQ community as enemy, how has the movement changed or moved as a result?

To explore the relationship between political homophobia and transphobia and the LGBTQ movement, I pursued a one-month-long field study, conducting interviews with LGBTQ leaders in the city of Yogyakarta, on the island of Java, Indonesia. From these interviews, it seems as though 2016 presented challenges for individual activists, increasingly divided the LGBTQ community, but

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<sup>1</sup> A participant described the use of the LGBTQ community in Indonesian political games, as the making of a collective “fresh meat.”

brought the movement closer to other social justice movements. In this report, I present these findings from this very limited and exploratory study, in hopes of providing an introductory understanding of the effects of state-initiated LGBTQ intolerance. In the future, I hope further studies are done to better know the nuanced effects of the “Crisis of 2016.”

## Methodology

To understand how politically motivated homophobia and transphobia have affected LGBTQ activism in Indonesia, I conducted a field study in Yogyakarta—also known as Jogja, Java, Indonesia. Due to time and resource constraints, I narrowed my scope to the LGBTQ movement in Jogja; however, this should not be interpreted as a representative or even an introductory understanding of the larger movement in Indonesia. It is merely an attempt to begin to understand how the anti-LGBTQ sentiment in the national context, localized throughout parts of Indonesia, was internalized in the city of Yogyakarta.

To do this, I sought to speak to “leaders” or more visible “activists” of the city’s LGBTQ movement. Wanting to respect and preserve the sanctity of community and trust within these LGBTQ-interest groups, I reached out to formal organizations, asking for help finding participants. I knew that by seeking out formally organized groups, I may be biasing against informal forms of activism; however, I recognized that these groups would require more personal and direct contact. Given the sensitive nature of this topic, I chose against engaging in any contact without a trusted third-party buffer to respect all potential participants’ feelings of personal safety. Of the five formal LGBTQ-interest organizations that I reached out to, four of them responded; however, these are but a few of the many existing in Yogyakarta. Four out of the five responded with a desire to meet, some requesting an initial contact session for matters relating to security and study ethics. After these initial meetings, I was given contact information for potential participants.

Participants were given an option to either choose to interview in Bahasa Indonesia or English, and for those who chose English, I re-emphasized their ability to speak Bahasa Indonesia as freely as they pleased. For interviews where I preemptively knew that I would require translation assistance, I asked a student from one of the local universities to join, but only after asking the

participants themselves if this was permissible. A few participants, at the end of our conversation, suggested other participants—reflective of a snowball method of data collection. Through this, I was able to speak to “leaders” of more informal forms of advocacy as well. Throughout the course of three weeks, I conducted a total of nine interviews each lasting on average between one to two hours. The findings from this study are presented in this report.

My participant selection process, in addition to the relatively small number of participants may present several biases, and thus the findings of this study should not be generalized, or even taken to be reflective of the larger LGBTQ movement in Yogyakarta. There are many LGBTQ-interest organizations in Jogja, both formal and informal, whose voices are not represented in this study. In addition, of those groups that were interviewed, I was only able to speak to one or two individuals from each, and thus, those voices may not fully represent the opinions or thoughts of the other members within that organization. In addition, so as not to impose my definition of “leader” on the groups themselves, there was no set qualification for what this identity entailed. Thus, there may be variation between the groups and organizations as to who was asked to participate. There are numerous other biases that have affected the findings of this report that must be taken seriously, so as not to overgeneralize the opinions and thoughts of the interviewed individuals to the population at large. Further study and research should be conducted to voice these underrepresented perspectives.

## Terminology

In Indonesia, the term used to describe the movement for diversity in gender and sexual identity, orientation, and expression seems to vary. During my study, some participants used the term ‘LGBT,’ while others used ‘LGBTQ’ or ‘LGBTIQ,’ or used all of them interchangeably. The most commonly used expression was ‘LGBT’; however, because there were participants who believed they fit outside the frameworks of ‘LGBT,’ but yet saw themselves as a part of the movement, I include the Q, queer or questioning, in my study. The Q, although it has been used derogatorily against sexual minorities in the past, has also had a history of inclusion. It leaves space for all non-heterosexual or non-cisgender sexual and gender minorities, without classifying oneself into a category. And because I spoke to individuals who did not categorize their sexual or gender identity, and also those who explicitly identified as queer, I believe there is value to including the Q in my term for the movement at large.

In doing this, I hope that I am not excluding those identifying as intersex, asexual, pansexual, etc., as they are all individually deserving of attention. But rather, as someone who self-identifies as queer and also a queer activist, hope that it is a push towards a larger understanding of gender and sexuality as non-binary and non-categorical.

In addition, when I say ‘LGBTQ’ in this paper, as a term used to describe sexual and gender minorities, I am including *waria* in my considerations. *Waria*, a local term loosely translated to transwoman, however, is and can be, although not necessarily, removed from the actual “LGBTQ” movement in Yogyakarta. That is, “LGBTQ” understood as an activist movement in Yogyakarta, is different from the term ‘LGBTQ’ used to describe the larger community of all sexual and gender minorities, which also includes *waria*. In doing this, I apologize for any confusion or any unintended association of *waria* to the “LGBTQ” movement. Without doing this, I fear that I will exclude *waria*

entirely from consideration as part of the gender and sexual minority experience, which, as discussed later, is not the case.

## A Need to Evaluate Political Homophobia and Transphobia

In academia, the ideas of “homophobia” and “transphobia” have largely been separated and removed from evaluations of state politics. This, as Bosnia and Weiss (2013) among others have argued, contributes to a continued devaluing of sexuality politics in considerations of “authentic” politics. It permits a pattern of state-sponsored homophobia—and transphobia, although Bosnia and Weiss do not make this distinction—to go unnoticed. The tactical creation of the categorical “other”—the threat of the LGBTQ liberation—is a political ploy that pivots state or individual actors’ benefits against the rights of gender and sexual minorities (Boellstorff, 2004). In its rhetoric, it frames the LGBTQ movement as an enemy of the state, and the nation’s culture and moral values—a “national threat” juxtaposed with a sense of urgency (McKay & Angotti, 2016). This encroaching “danger,” Bosnia and Weiss have found, does not coincide with progress or provoking action by the local LGBTQ movement, rights event or action, often in the presence of weak or non-existent activism (2013, p. 13). Whatever activism exists, it harms or paralyzes, for the advantage of state actors and the elite ruling class (Bosnia & Weiss, 2013, p. 15).

Although it may be unfair to call the events of 2016 political homophobia or transphobia, because the political motivations and or beneficiaries are unknown, we can at least look at how it was instigated, disseminated and affected sexual and gender minorities. Because, regardless of motivation, the effect is nonetheless real, and should be considered seriously.

## The “Crisis” of 2016

In the past few years, Indonesia has seen an increase in homophobia and transphobia, some calling it “The Crisis of 2016” and an “Anti-LGBT Moral Panic” (Davies, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2016). It’s believed to have started in January of 2016, when Muhammad Nasir, Indonesia’s Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education stated that LGBT groups should be barred from university campuses, arguing that universities have an obligation to uphold moral values (Zuhdiar, 2016). He added that the country’s universities should withdraw support from campus organizations promoting LGBT activities (Zuhdiar, 2016).<sup>2</sup> In a response to public dissent, Nasir softened his earlier statements via Twitter, stating that it is not “LGBTs,” but the activity of “showing romance, kissing and making love [in public]” that he finds problematic; however, the anti-LGBTQ effect of his earlier statement had already begun (Fauzi, 2016).<sup>3</sup> Following Nasir’s statements, prominent public officials, along with other social actors joined in to express their own homophobic sentiments, including:

February 12, 2016: Yuddy Chrisnandi, Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform Minister stated that homosexuality within civil servants is unacceptable, adding that while the practice of polygamy is still normal, LGBT is not (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

February 16, 2016: Khofifa Indar Parawansa, Minister of Social Affairs, stated that on a recent trip to Lombok, she found that LGBT groups targeted young boys with gifts and lipsticks, converting them “in a very short time” (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

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<sup>2</sup> Zuhdiar of Antara News reports Nasir’s original statement: “*Masa kampus untuk itu? Ada standar nilai dan standar susila yang harus dijaga. Kampus adalah penjaga moral... Kelompok LGBT tidak boleh dibiarkan berkembang dan diberi ruang segala aktivitasnya. Apalagi, komunitas LGBT disinyalir masuk ke kampus dengan kelompok kajian atau diskusi ilmiah.*”

<sup>3</sup> Gilang Fauzi of CNN Indonesia reports Nasir’s tweet January 25, 2016: “Larangan saya terhadap LGBT masuk kampus apabila mereka melakukan tindakan yang kurang terpuji seperti bercinta atau pamer kemesraan di kampus.”

February 20, 2016: Indonesia's Defense Minister, Ryamizard Ryacudu stated that the LGBT movement is a proxy war used to subtly used to threaten state power, likening the community's demands to a weapon more dangerous than a nuclear bomb (Tempo.co, 2016).

February 27, 2016: The Secretary General of the Hanura Party, Berliana Kartakusumah, encouraged banning LGBT individuals, like the nation banned communism and drug trafficking (Davies, 2016).

March 7, 2016: Mahfudz Siddiq, a member of the House of Representatives stated that "LGBT issues can damage national security, identity, culture, and the faith of Indonesians" (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

These are just a few of the examples of the homophobic and transphobic discourses that were used in 2016 by state actors. The charged words incited consequences—violent attacks and expressed widespread intolerance of the LGBTQ community across the nation.

### A Look at Yogyakarta

To give one example of how a wave of homophobia showed itself, I looked closely at one city—Yogyakarta. It's important to remember, however, that the anti-LGBTQ movement varied greatly by region, and Yogyakarta, and more specifically the city of Yogyakarta, is only a small part of a much larger nation. There are especially differences between urban and rural areas. Even within Yogyakarta, there are variations between the activists' understandings of 2016. From those with whom I spoke to, there appears to be three larger incidents that defined the "LGBTQ crisis," although not all participants recognized all three:

In February, 2016: *Pondok Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah*, believed to be the only Islamic boarding school for transwomen, was confronted by an Islamic fundamentalist group, FUI (Forum Umat Islam), known as Islamic Community Forum. FUI strategically spread transphobia to the school's previously accepting and welcoming neighbors. They, together with members of FUI demanded that *Pondok Pesantren* be shut down. Members of the *pesantren* went to the police to seek assistance and protection. While the police provided physical protection and security of the building's quarters, they did not investigate the perpetrators—FUI. Seeking to report this police misconduct, members of the *pesantren* demanded a copy of the official file, in order to file a claim with higher authorities. The police refused to provide a copy of this report (Participant A, Participant B, Participant D, Participant E, Participant H).

On February 23, 2016, there was a conflict between the Democratic Solidarity Movement and an anti-LGBT protest, both of whom had planned a march on the same date and time in Yogyakarta. The Democratic Solidarity Movement, representing a multitude of issues and interests including LGBTQ voices, was attacked by the anti-LGBTQ marchers with violence. A fight initiated between members in the two groups. Then, on April 2, 2016 Lady Fast, a women's art and film exhibition was shut down by the police, FUI, and FJI (Front Jihad Islam), Front of Jihadist Islam. Participants said that homophobic rhetoric was used during the pursuit, "accusing" some of them of "lesbianism" (Participant A, Participant B, Participant D, Participant E, Participant G).

In addition to more public forms of physical confrontation and violence, individualized hate crime and less direct, but nonetheless traumatic, hate speech increased. Throughout the city of Yogyakarta, posters, banners, and signs with anti-LGBTQ hate speech expressing intolerance, denouncing human rights, calling it a mental illness demanding conversion therapy were displayed. Some restaurants posted signs reading, "LGBT *Dilarang Masuk*"—LGBT are not allowed to enter

(Figure 1). This rhetoric trickled into residential spaces as well. *Rumah Kos*, small dormitory-styled living spaces, updated their house rules to say drugs, alcohol, and LGBT are not allowed (Figure 2). Although prior to 2016, visibly identifiable members of the LGBTQ community faced discrimination in housing, in 2016, landlords made conscious efforts to expel *waria* from their quarters. Several of my participants stated that the rise in hate speech was an indicator of the “crisis.” Prior to 2016, they said that while in media, or in other spaces, they experienced anti-LGBT rhetoric, they rarely saw banners or posters deliberately targeting the community. Then, in 2016, both public and private spaces became avenues for spreading homophobia and transphobia (Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant G, Participant H).

Figure 1



Photo Credits: Anonymous

Figure 2

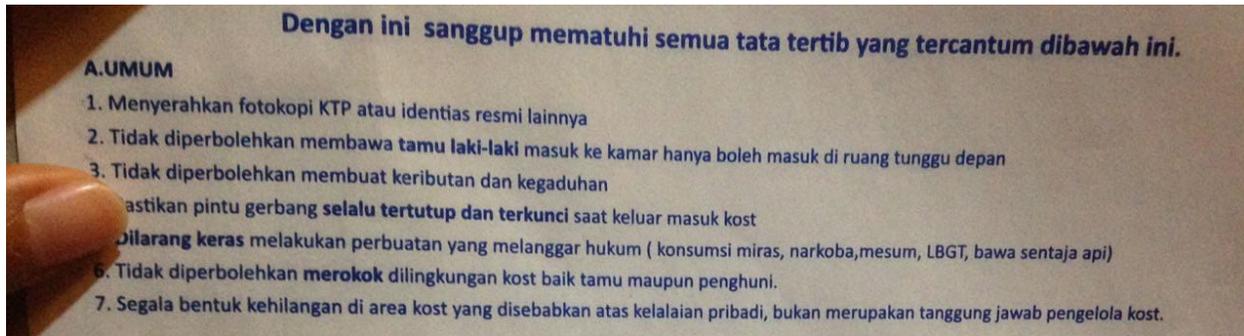


Photo Credits: Anonymous

Participants described the danger of being identified as pro-LGBTQ on the streets, whether by a visible identity or by wearing pro-movement gear on the streets. *Waria*, whose identity as a member of the LGBTQ community is more readily identifiable, were randomly attacked by strangers on the street—using both verbal or physical assault, throwing cans of water, etc. One participant recalled a friend who was confronted by FUI for having a “Stop Bullying” pin, with a rainbow background on their backpack (Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant D, Participant G, Participant H).

In addition, there were targeted attacks on LGBTQ activists and allies. One activist described how a fundamentalist took a picture of their motorbike tag, saying it will be posted, threatening to “be careful.” One member of an LGBTQ-interest organization shared how in 2016 their office was actively sought out for, with hate speech graffitied on the organization’s signs across the street. Luckily, when the fundamentalist group came searching, everyone had already left, so there was no physical altercation. Nonetheless, the organization relocated anyways for fear of attack. Even allies, in supporting their LGBTQ counterparts, were accused of either being “gay” or “lesbian” or attacked for expressing their solidarity.

These effects are understood differently by members of Jogja’s LGBTQ community, and seem to vary by age, sexual and gender identity, engagement with activism, etc., and thus, should not

be understood in any way as a comprehensive explanation of all experiences. This is especially true given the many unrepresented voices in my study. However, from this, we can at least begin to understand the atmosphere of homophobia and transphobia in Yogyakarta in 2016.

## What's in a 'Crisis'?

### A Pattern of Sustained Homophobia

In evaluating the rise of hostility against the LGBTQ community, we should be careful not to imply a duality—that is, a homophobic “crisis” in 2016 does not mean LGBTQ oppression and marginalization did not exist prior. To do this, would be to ignore the long history of oppression, discrimination and violence endured by the community well before 2016. Participants stressed this underrepresented truth—heteronormativity, cisnormativity, homophobia and transphobia manifested in discrimination, hate, and oppression existed well before the claimed “crisis.” In fact, some participants even expressed resentment or confusion on the concentrated attention to 2016—to create the illusion that LGBTQ life is somehow *now* under attack, is inherently political, as the community has long felt unaccepted and oppressed. Throughout the country, the LGBTQ identity was shaped as an enemy to the people, to morality, and to national security. It was framed as a Western agenda, particularly by the United States to start a ‘proxy war’ in the country.

This sentiment mimics Tom Boellstorff’s analysis of Indonesia’s attitude towards LGBT in 2004: a heteronormative society with pockets of progressing homophobia. His study—of which contains an important distinction between an atmosphere of pro-heterosexual relationships, usually as a result of normalization, and that of intentional hate and intolerance against homosexual ones—shows how oppression and a systematic silencing of sexual minorities may exist, even without an active homophobic voice before 2016 (Boellstorff, 2004). Boellstorff does not speak on the status of cisnormativity versus transphobia within the archipelago; however, in this absence, we should not assume that transphobia mirrors nor progresses with homophobia. Several participants noted society’s perception of and experiences within the transgender community as distinct from that of their lesbian and gay counterparts, of which is explained in greater detail in sections to follow.

Nonetheless, whether Indonesia is either heteronormative or cisnormative, both, or progressing towards each's respective counterparts—the community has been silenced to tread carefully as outsiders of society's accepted norms. As a result, they might have had lower visibility; however, this should hardly be accepted as tolerance, nor give an illusion of a thriving community. 2016 should be understood as tactically raising visibility of anti-LGBTQ, when the LGBTQ movement has yet to claim the same space.

### More than Religion

In evaluating political homophobia and transphobia in Indonesia, we should avoid faulting the increasing homophobia and transphobia to the Islamic faith. A few of the news reports in English on the “Crisis of 2016,” directly or indirectly relate Islam to the creation of anti-LGBTQ intolerance. They note the country's increasing religiosity and the large Muslim population as a descriptive setting; however, in the Western gaze, this is interpreted with a guiding assumption—*No surprise, of course homophobic and transphobic attacks occur in Muslim-dominant countries*. These hidden Islamophobic assumptions are precisely the reason why homophobia and transphobia need to be considered in a political context (let's also not forget Christianity's history of intolerance as well). While it is true that some of the violent attacks against the LGBTQ community were by Islamic fundamentalist groups, it's insufficient to say that the widespread intolerance of 2016 is a product of the Islamic faith. As Boellstorff explains, homophobia used as a political strategy is different from societal homophobia, as political homophobia involves a tactical creation and incitement of intolerance (2004). To evaluate or assume that the “Crisis of 2016” was a result of Indonesia's dominant religion—Islam—is erroneous, as it devalues the role of political agents and a strategic exploitation of a minority identity for selfish gain. Thus, in this study I focus on the role of political

homophobia, even though I recognize religion may also play a role in the creation of societal homophobia.

### A State of Identity-Targeting Political Turbulence

The LGBTQ community was not the only group under siege in 2016—in fact, the year was a year of turbulence for minority groups across the country. This includes the Papuan community, communists—and in its pursuit—socialists, religious minorities, and the Chinese and Chinese Indonesian community. The 2016 can be understood as a year of instability for many of these minority groups. The increase in oppression against other minority groups show the political nature of 2016—almost like chaos by design. Although many of these groups faced increased hostility, the most well identified and publicized is the LGBTQ crisis. This can be understood strategically as well—one unified “other” is stronger than many divided efforts.

## Effects on the LGBTQ Movement

These openly homophobic sentiments found itself in violence, hate crimes, discrimination and oppression against the LGBTQ community throughout the country. In Yogyakarta, through my limited, exploratory study, I began to understand the ways in which the dissemination of homophobia affected the LGBTQ movement and activism in 2016. I would, however, like to re-emphasize the diversity of LGBTQ-interest groups and organizations, whose voices are excluded from this study. I only spoke to a small portion of the many formal and informal groups due to time and resource constraints. Thus, we should approach the findings mindful of potential bias against an unrepresented voice. Of those with whom I spoke to, there seems to be a few ways in which we can understand how activism was affected in 2016:

### Hindrances to Individual Participation

Individuals were discouraged from joining or staying in LGBTQ-interest groups. As mentioned earlier, LGBTQ individuals, activists, allies were targeted, causing fear of being affiliated with the movement. It seems like the fear revolved around concerns for physical security, as well as a fear of ostracization, or a future damnation—a worry that somehow one will be publicly outed, and for the rest of their life be discoverable as LGBTQ.

### Effects on Activists' Mental Health

As a result of the “panic,” activists faced mental health issues. One participant described the year as “psychological terror,” saying: “[The nation] somehow panicking making us panic, even for the LGBT who is not part of the movement” (Participant H). The persisting homophobia and

transphobia created a psychologically taxing atmosphere for members, and especially for active leaders within the movement. One activist described how in 2016, they often had trouble sleeping at night. In continuing support for the LGBTQ community, they witnessed a lot of the hateful and violent attacks, causing them and the other activists, to be “sick” the following year—as one participant describes—i.e. overly exhausted. Some sought asylum outside of the country, while others withdrew from movement efforts for mental health purposes as a result. Organizations, already burdened by member-inactivity, external threat, and decreasing voice, were further weakened:

[Our organization] before depend on the activist. One or two activists. So, when one or two activist have problem, like psychological problem, because of the crackdown—I mean [our organization] collapsed slowly. Losing the members. The program is not really work properly (Participant B).

Activists generally seem to be understanding towards peers seeking mental health services and asylum, even if it means leaving the movement at critical times. Others seem to disagree, criticizing these leaders who leave the movement as benefactors of elite activism. One participant stated that the ideas of “well-being” and “mental health” were newly introduced in 2016 to activist discourses in Indonesia, saying 2016 was the first year it was brought up. Those leaving, some participants stated, are capitalizing on their financial and opportunity privilege to find peace while the larger group suffers. In addition, participants expressed concern for using mental health as justification to leave—although they recognize the legitimate claim in it—as an excuse that further displays elitism within the movement. Their argument: many activists suffered from mental health issues during 2016, but were not aware of the actual term. To take awareness of “wellness” and exit the movement, leaves the difficult tasks to activists who are financially less privileged.

## Elevated Family Pressures

Activists, even those internally strongly devoted to the movement, faced challenges from family. Family members in the past, it seems, generally did not support LGBTQ activism, but passively accepted it. 2016, however, raised the visibility of the concept of ‘LGBT’ and of LGBTQ activism throughout the nation. Thus, family members became familiar with the negative stereotypes associated with sexual minorities, and suddenly began using the rhetoric disseminated from the outside homophobia and transphobia:

You know, you make a big scene by keep on, defending the, fighting for the gays. What are you going to be? You are going to be sent to hell. Everyday you made a sinful act.” Before [2016] they never talk to me about that, but after they do (Participant H).

Coming from a family member, the shift between passive acceptance to suddenly charging sin and damnation can be alarming at best, and incredibly painful and disheartening. The crisis from the outside had somehow infiltrated their private sphere, one where they could previously determine when and how LGBTQ issues were discussed.

The dissemination of homophobia and transphobia into private-life seemed to especially affect younger activists. For some, it changed family members’ perception of what it means to be LGBTQ, while for others it created a new fear for a child engaged with LGBTQ activism. One participant spoke on their parents’ overall loving support for their sexual identity, but disapproval of working in activism and advocacy:

“Why are you working in that sensitive issue. You shouldn’t working in that kind of... that is too sensitive, you shouldn’t working in that kind of issue (Participant C).”

The members who disengaged from activism at the request of family members stated that they were

just thankful to have parents who accept their sexual identity. They recognize the difficulty in having an LGBTQ child, let alone accepting that child. Thus, participants emphasized how they respectfully listen to the requests by accepting family members, even if it means leaving the movement.

This seemed to particularly affect young members of the LGBTQ community, which may be due to the importance of elder respect in Javanese and Indonesian culture.

## Dividing the Community

### Separation by Political Identity

Prior to 2016, LGBTQ-interest organizations were facing increasingly worsening division by political identity. The separation of formal and informal groups by identity interests seems to coincide with Ridwan and Wu's analysis of LGBTQ activism in Indonesia; however, in Yogyakarta, there seem to be further divisions. Ridwan and Wu identified three common types of LGBT groups: trans group, groups for gay men and MSM—men who have sex with other men—who put a focus on HIV and AIDs education and prevention, and those for lesbian and bisexual women, who focus on violence against women (2018). It seems like these separations are largely true, although, in Yogyakarta, I was unable to find any services specifically for lesbian and bisexual interests. In addition, the transgender community is further divided in Yogyakarta—services for transwomen and transmen are separate. And, as mentioned earlier, services for *waria*, in the sense of the local term, seems to be separated from efforts for 'transwoman' as a part of the Western 'LGBT' term.

These separations existed prior to 2016, and in fact, according to some of my participants they have been progressively getting worse since the end of Suharto's regime. After 2016, however, there seems to have been some more separation, or at least a furthering of already existing separations. This might have been due to the overall panic and negative stigma around the term 'LGBT' that pushed organizations and groups to disassociate. For example, some of my participants described that some HIV/AIDs-interest groups made efforts to dissociate with the LGBTQ movement. These effects were especially exacerbated by funding sources, which especially into later 2016 and 2017, were explicitly against any LGBTQ related programming. One of the participants described being rejected from an HIV/AIDs clinic, after responding to a required question on the pre-service questionnaire, "Are you LGBT?" A criticism, however, is that these organizations, even

prior to 2016, were specifically only catered to the gay population, largely leaving the trans, lesbian, and bisexual communities excluded from care. Therefore, it's possible the only significant effect on HIV/AIDs-prevention organizations in 2016 was a move away from supporting gay men and MSM in Yogyakarta.

*Waria*-interest efforts were also further detached from LGBTQ ones. As described earlier, *waria* face a lot of difficulty with harassment on the streets, discrimination in housing, work, school and other public spaces, and difficulties obtaining an ID card for health services. These hindrances among others it seems, made it necessary for *waria*-based organizations to build a separate identity in the 2000s. There does also seem to be a wider acceptance, or at least an understanding of the idea of *waria*. One *waria*-interest organization described being supported by Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), although the same group openly detested LGBT in 2016. The participant stated:

... [NU] support transwomen, yea. But not support LGBT. You must separate this thing:

They support transwomen, but they not support LGBT (Participant).<sup>4</sup>

According to them, Nahdlatul Ulama actually increased backing for *waria* that year. It is unclear what NU's exact motivations to support the organization was, but it may be understood in a few ways that further explains what precisely it is about 'LGBT' that is politically profitable.

They said that Islam is accept transwoman who is transwoman from the childhood. He's already being transwoman, so they accept that. All of who start from Islamic school boarding, and is transwoman (Participant).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I purposefully refrain from identifying this participant in this context.

<sup>5</sup> I purposefully refrain from identifying this participant in this context.

A woman, who knows she is a transwoman from a young age, especially if she has grown up in the context of an Islamic boarding school, is acceptable. When the participant was describing this thought, it was unclear if it was the idea of a heterosexual transwoman, homosexual transwoman, or a heterosexual cross-dressing man, but when we continued speaking, it seemed to be precisely this that made *waria* more acceptable—an identity not intrinsically tied to one’s sexual desires or inclinations. This somehow legitimizes this identity, further incentivizing *waria*-interest groups to separate from the larger LGBT movement.

#### Against the “LGBTQ Activist”

There also appears to be stigma or sense of separation within the LGBTQ movement against individuals considered “activists.” Many individuals, especially those unaffiliated with official organizations were quick to say that they are not activists:

I also cannot say that I am an activist...So I’m not the one who jump into the streets marching and do that kind of stuff, but I’m working, I’m working under the table, behind the table, working with issue in the empowerment (Participant C).

This idea of an “activist” seems to describe an individual who is loud, protesting in the streets, and relentlessly advocating for LGBTQ rights regardless of situational conditions.

You know I say that I’m loud, but only in my circle. But some of [the activists] are like really loud, and they didn’t take any consideration into their environment. But that could be like dangerous for me. I mean if you just like really loud to everyone and didn’t consider environment and the people that you are telling that you are gay, it could be dangerous, I

think. Like how like it can make like those people feel dangerous, so they can just do something bad.

It's not just me—my identity, but the whole people in the community. You know there's this one person who is really loud, "Okay, I'm a lesbian. Blah blah blah." And it's to literally everyone around her, even though she knows that some people could feeling like triggered by that. And I don't want to like trigger anyone. Because it could be danger for people in community, not only me, but literally everyone in LGBT community in Indonesia (Participant F).

Thus, there seems to be resentment against these "loud" activists, because they taint the image of the LGBTQ movement as radical, bringing this hate and backlash against the community, even sometimes inciting violence.

Since it's already been culture how people are proud to be straight, or how... the homophobia, the bigotry is already being part of the culture. That's why we need to make a softer approach. If we want to empower them. Especially like that, elections, the issue of elections. Uh... lately the LGBT being part of political war. Political weapon... uh, so it's pretty important for us to take the right step (Participant C).

As one participant describes, there are two kinds of LGBTQ individuals, although I think from these further nuanced examples, there may be three.

You can say that there is [...] two kind of LGBT around me. The first is those who are LGBT and proud, and want to offer support activism and are declare, declare about them self in the righteous way, like putting the rainbow flag on the Instagram, and those things. And the second one is those who... they are gay, they are lesbians, but they are more chill.

And “okay, I support our group, my group, but I cannot expose it to my social life”  
(Participant C).

Here the separation is a binary between an openly out activist and a quiet individual who is not out to anyone. But in speaking with the participants explicitly identifying as “non-activist,” there seems to be at least another potential classification: those advocating for LGBTQ-interests in less public spaces, where their identity is more controlled, providing support and community for others. What’s interesting here, is that it seems that some of the homophobic and transphobic rhetoric from the “crisis” outside has transcended within the movement itself. There seems to be a blaming of the more outspoken “activists” for confirming or provoking negative backlash or even violence.

In this division between activist and non-activist, there is also a separation between “loud” LGBTQ versus “softer” LGBTQ. “Loud” activism seems to be equated to working to promote LGBTQ-interests beyond fundamental rights, while a “softer” approach aims to advocate for basic rights for the community:

What I did is pretty soft approach to LGBT issue, by showing the side of human rights. That’s the most acceptable side if you want to empower LGBT in Indonesia. By saying that, “Well, at least they are human. They should have the basic rights to the human things,” but if you coming, if you want to take into like, “Oh LGBT should have rights to express themselves. Rights to marry.” People are going to be screaming out. [...] I mean like [...] how actually people get killed just because they are LGBT. [...]The main argument that I tell to people is, “You cannot, you can say that you are not accepting them, but at least you respecting them as human being.” (Participant C).

The “loud” activism, associated with the idea “activist” goes too far, because it advocates for things like marriage equality, which causes zealous homophobia in the cultural context. “Softer”

approaches focus on the human rights of LGBTQ individuals, asking for basic services such as health care—a problem members of the transgender community face without sufficient state-provided identification—arguing, “Aren’t all humans entitled to these rights?” What’s interesting is that even the participants who others may consider “loud activists” mentioned a rights-based platform.

Of course, on a national scale there may be visible, “loud” activists, who engage in more “radical” forms of activism, and negatively change the face of LGBTQ activism. From the participants I spoke to in Yogyakarta, however, there seems to be a unanimous understanding of what activism should and can do within the surrounding cultural frame—fundamental rights and safety for LGBTQ. This separation then, may be understood as a product of political homophobia and transphobia within the movement itself: a resentment and dissociation with the “activists” worsening the zealous intolerance for all LGBTQ.

### Loss of Member to Member Support

Organizations and groups reported limiting or closing-down activities as a result of the events of 2016. As mentioned earlier, some organizations were stopped or hindered by fear of or direct confrontations with anti-LGBTQ vigilantes. Those who closed expressed concern for the safety, reputation and welfare of their organization. The fear of contributing to the negative stereotype associated with the LGBTQ community seems to be a concern.

If we, we activity secretly, this is look like we are doing something bad, something false. We believe we are doing everything is the good, and the good thing. So be brave in that activity, because we are, we believe this is uh something good (Participant A).

Especially in visible moments such as these, when they are directly attacked by hate and violence, they seem to value acting calmly, to carefully tread a line so as to not contribute to the problem. This includes closing down services for months. Although these activists may have received support through other means, the larger organization was absent as a result of the political homophobia and transphobia of 2016.

Some organizations described “filtering” their members. They feared that somehow their location would be revealed again, or that the personal identity of the members could be compromised. Thus, in order to protect the future of their organization, they had to reevaluate their members and limit services to those that they trusted. This of course limits access of services for members of the LGBTQ community; however, there is the larger concern for their own safety.

It also seems as though groups, especially on college campuses were affected. In the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, a support group, known as SGRC (Support Group and Resource Center on Sexuality Studies) was attacked and shut down. The center offered counseling for its university students via a hotline; however, when pamphlets offering the service were distributed, they were faced with heated resentment. Intolerant anti-LGBT groups attacked SGRC, and public officials offered no support to protect the students (Participant D, Participant E).

From this, it seems as though formal methods of support for the LGBTQ community were limited. Visible organizations and support networks were hindered by non-state actors, whose actions were maintained through legal avenues and state power. The organizations, facing injustice, were forced to be complicit, in recognition of the effects of their actions on the larger LGBTQ community, and for the future survival of the organization. Of course, we can hardly say these were

deliberate choices—they were made in times where security and safety were threatened. It's important then to see how access to members of the LGBTQ community were affected. If, as we saw earlier, individuals were personally affected in 2016, decreasing formal support may further silence activism.

## Changing the Movement

Challenged and oppressed by state and non-state actors, the LGBTQ movement persisted in the hands of devoted activists. As methods of activism became increasingly unfeasible, the movement explored new avenues for advocacy and LGBTQ support.

## Strengthening Solidarity

As a result of some of the events in 2016, it seems as though the larger LGBTQ movement began sharing more solidarity with other minority groups. Although, as discussed previously in this essay, the LGBTQ movement itself began to separate by political ideology, the collective support for ‘LGBT’ strengthened. This may have come as a result of increased oppression and attacks on several groups in Yogyakarta, demanding a collective and unified voice. On February 23, 2016, the Democratic Solidarity Movement planned a march on the same day as an anti-LGBTQ protest. The demonstrations were planned for the same day, at the same time, just in different parts of the city. The Democratic Solidarity Movement’s march was subsequently attacked by anti-LGBTQ protestors. Even though they were not marching only for LGBTQ-interests, but rather for all oppressed voices fighting for democracy, this event showed them putting LGBTQ-rights on a much higher pedestal—this issue is sufficient enough to rally on a day specifically concerning LGBTQ rights.

Democracy is threatened because of the situation. So we fight for LGBT, we fight for it. If anyone created that demonstration as LGBT demonstration, it’s not true. I’m the coordinator of the demonstration, and I can say that it’s not LGBT demonstration. It’s uh pro-democracy group that fight for demonstration group that hate LGBT, you know? [...]

But that's the first time that every movement joined together and try to put aside their group interest and fight for democracy (Participant B).

Thus, it can be understood as a development of solidarity: both to the pro-democracy movement to the LGBTQ-interest, and that of the LGBTQ struggle to the larger effort of democracy. As stated earlier, this effort is not representative of the LGBTQ group at large, as there are many divisions within it. Some of these groups and independent individuals have expressed disagreement and resentment towards efforts such as these.

## Conclusion

In 2016 the LGBTQ community of Yogyakarta became “fresh meat” for political game. Framing sexual and gender minorities as a threat requiring immediate retaliation, the movement, already facing challenges in an increasingly homophobic and transphobic society, was brought under siege. In efforts to better know the effects of state-issued intolerance, this study looked closer at LGBTQ activists and leaders in the city of Yogyakarta. From these interviews, I began to understand activism as a result of 2016 in these ways:

Individual activists were challenged and deterred from further participation in the LGBTQ movement. Seen as sinners, activists feared for their personal safety. They were attacked by anti-LGBTQ vigilantes, and this in turn, created a fear for other activists to withdraw participation. In addition, activists faced mental health challenges, a result of fighting the growing homophobia and transphobia. Some leaders, especially those exposed to multiple traumatic experiences, disaffiliated which had repercussions for a movement heavily dependent on its leaders. In addition, activists faced increased restrictions or disapproval from family members. The homophobia and transphobia from outside began infiltrating their family lives and proceeded to further discourage activism.

The LGBTQ movement itself was further divided as a result of 2016. Prior to 2016, there were many divisions by political identity—*waria*, gay men and MSM, transmen, HIV/AIDs, etc. As “LGBTQ” became increasingly negatively stigmatized, organizations and activists made conscious efforts to dissociate from the larger movement. This seems to be particularly true for the *waria* community and the HIV/AIDs interest groups in Yogyakarta. In addition, there were also divisions between the larger movement as well against “loud” activism and activists. As rhetoric from the outside concerning the threatening LGBTQ movement disseminated into the movement, members sought to remove themselves from this perceived problematic form of activism. In doing so, they separate the identity of activist to that of elevating human rights for sexual and gender minorities.

In facing these challenges, the larger LGBTQ movement also seems to have gained solidarity with pro-democracy groups, and thus with other minority groups across Yogyakarta. The LGBTQ issue was legitimately recognized as needing collective effort. Thus, although the movement faced increased difficulties within, especially via fission dictated by political identity, the movement grew stronger in support on the outside.

In claiming these findings, I would like to re-emphasize the importance of understanding 2016 and its events in a much broader context of LGBTQ history in Indonesia. Oppression and intolerance of gender and sexual minorities have long existed and have been slowly increasing since 2010. The “Crisis of 2016” should be understood as significant but maybe not quite pivotal in obstruction of LGBTQ activism nor experience. This is especially true given the broad range of intersectional factors that nuance individual LGBTQ experience in Indonesia. For these reasons and others, the LGBTQ community should be further studied as limited studies, such as this, capture only a small fraction of a much larger story. This story, carrying grief, sorrow, passion, strength and resilience deserves to be authentically viewed and valued. It is a story important not only to queer theorists, but to all interested in the construction of oppressive power—that is, political homophobia and transphobia as powerful methods of control by state and non-state actors.

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