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Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah: Navigating the Intersection of Gender Nonconformity and Islam in Indonesia

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I. Acknowledgements

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II. Introduction

In early March of 2023, I entered the Pesantren Ali Maksum Krapyak, an Islamic boarding school in Yogyakarta, Java. Young students lined the passageway to the *masjid* (place of study and prayer) greeting us with a synchronous "*assalamualaikum."* They not only knew we were coming but had extensively prepared for our arrival. Through PowerPoint presentations and the following Q and A we were told by both *kyai* (religious teachers/spiritual leaders) and *santri* (students), about the structure of the school. We learned how religious courses such as Quranic recitation, Islamic literature, and priesthood traditions, were taught alongside "secular" disciplines such as math and English, how the entire day was planned to the minute but there is respite within that plan to partake in recreational activities such as *gamelan* (Indonesian instrumental ensemble) and soccer.

After the presentations, we were led into the *pondok* or dormitory, a three-storied building littered with books and stuffed animals; a less filtered presentation of the school. Swarms of giggling girls shuffled me through their rooms, lined with mattresses, asking me if I was on Tik Tok or liked Taylor Swift. While they didn't suppress their eagerness to return home, they called the *pesantren* their second family. I left the school with a snack box and a solid grounding in the nationally understood structures of *pesantren.*

Pesantren have been instrumental in shaping Islamic religious collectivity in Indonesia. In the 16th century, after Islam had been introduced to Indonesia through Arab and Indian traders, Muslims co-opted the system, originally used for Hindu education in India, to serve the function of Islamic religious study.

As syncretic Islam rapidly spread through the archipelago (leading to Indonesia becoming the largest Muslim-majority country in the world) so did the *pesantren* system, establishing Islam not only as a personal theology but an institutionally established lifestyle. Pesantren Ali Maksum Krayap is one of 40,000 established schools in Indonesia today. These schools are supported by the largest Islamic organization in the world, Nahlatul Ulama, whose traditionalist ideologies on cultural integration are reflected in the *pesantrens'* teachings which explicitly draw upon indigenous knowledge predating the arrival of Islamic schools of thought.

There are two commonly recognized branches of *pesantren.* The first is the classical model, called *pesantren salafiyah,* in which religious sciences are the sole subject of study. The alternative, modern model, is called the *pesantren kholafiyah* which teaches secular courses alongside religious ones. Pesantren Ali Maksum Krapyak, takes on a third model, a synthesis of both *salafiyah* and *kholafiyah*, integrating *pesantren* local curriculum unified through the use of the *kitab kuning* (the traditional set of texts that *santri* study) with national curriculum, dictated by the Ministry of Religious Affair and the Ministry of Education.

Despite the integration of 'progressive' community engagements into the core curriculum of *pesantren kholafiyah,* the system has been looked to as breeding grounds for extremist forms of militant Islam. However, the contemporary *pesantren* system has grown far too variable to cite it as producing one archetypally conservative religious subject.

This became particularly clear to me when around a month after my visit to Ali Maksum, I entered another *pesantren* in Yogyakarta where no one was asking me if I liked Taylor Swift. While the school calls itself a *pesantren,* to an unknowing observer it is unrecognizable as such. The space necessitates a reconceptualization of the hallmark structures that have come to define *pesantren.* The average age of the *santri* far surpasses that of a typical pesantren while their

numbers are far fewer. Only a couple of these *santri* live in what could be considered the *pondok*, a residential home on the outskirts of Yogyakarta, a space that also serves as the classroom and *masjid.*

While the *pesantren* system has historically been grounded in a notion of tolerance, that tolerance has not necessarily transcended to those whose gender identity doesn't fall within a traditional male-female binary. The Pondok Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah is the first and only explicitly transgender *pesantren*. Al-Fatah means "victory," and *waria,* a combination of the terms *wanita* (woman) and *pria* (man), can be roughly translated to male-to-female transgender women.

The term *waria* came into use in the early 1960s, and is commonly thought of as 'a woman's soul in a male's body.' *Waria* have been most overtly recognized in the domestic sector working as hair stylists, makeup artists, dance entertainers, and sex workers. While historically scholars have cited *waria* as a "third gender," anthropologist Tom Boellstorff refutes this understanding stating, "the third-gender concept is often overemployed and poorly defined. I argue that waria are not a third gender' but a 'male femininity.'"[1] He goes on to claim that "the concept 'waria' operates within the orbit of male gendering."[2] Following Boellstorff's lead, I take *waria* to be a cultural category specific to Indonesia that is impossible to directly map onto Western frameworks of gender and queerness.

Despite this preface of locality, my theoretical and ethnographic considerations will reconstruct rather than simply represent the school, both by virtue of the inability to maintain objectivity in the written form at large as well as by my explicit inclusion of scholars from, or intellectually rooted in, Western academia.

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[1] Boellstorff, "Playing Back a Nation: Waria, Indonesian Transvestites, 161.
[2] *Ibid.*

Demonstrations of state-sanctioned and religiously informed anti-queerness in Indonesia may make a radically inclusive gender community and a *pesantren* seem like two mutually exclusive phenomena. However, the lived reality of *waria* Muslims illustrates a dissonance between mainstream homophobic discourses and the personal experience of faith. This notion of supposed incompatibility between gendered and religious expressions of identity lies at the core of my analytical considerations. This project explores how Muslim Indonesians have come to terms (or failed to come to terms) with Muslim queer identities in conjunction with one another through religious, cultural, and national modes of ideological dispersion, honing in on the particular space of the Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah and how it affords a reconsideration of seemingly unbridgeable difference.

III. Research Methods / Ethical Considerations

The timing of my research was not conducive to my initial envisioning of ethnography-adjacent work, my hopes to receive somewhat of an "immersive" experience within the *pesantren* were quickly dashed upon arriving in Yogyakarta on April 17. *Eid Al-Fitr* was on April 21, marking the end of *Ramadan* and the beginning of a lull in Java; a break for both secular and Muslim educational institutions. For *pesantren* this means that *santri* and *kyai* return to their respective homes for two weeks. Despite Pondok Pesantren Waria Al-Fatahs' divergence from the body of classical *pesantrens* in notably core ways, it is not exempt from this academic calendar. Regular activity and prayer would not resume until May 7.

This comically poor timing necessitated a revisioning of my field sites' spatial terrain. My web of informants had to expand from the school itself to those proximate but not within it. I ended up conducting twelve interviews in total. Six of these informants had roles within the

pesantren itself while the others were situated in the broader Muslim community of Yogyakarta. The group that I will refer to as "external" participants had varying levels of familiarity with the school - ranging from those who had done extensive research about the institution to those who were introduced to it upon my request to talk.

Despite their discontinuity in familiarity they were all, to some degree, connected with the Gadjah Mada University, or UGM. This feels important to note in order to underscore that the voices I discuss in this paper cannot, in any way, be seen as representative of a larger (arguably non-existent) "Islamic" sentiment on matters of queer acceptance. Several of my informants explicitly noted or alluded to the fact that their positioning within the sphere of 'progressive academia' informed the frameworks in which they spoke on gender in Islam.

While this skewed demographic could be seen as a misleading representation, I don't feel as if it's an irresponsible one. Western-secular public discourse has notoriously outsized ultra-conservative voices to represent *the* word of Islam. A hyperfixation on fundamentalist ideology would foster Islamaphobic tropes of the inseparability of oppressive conservatism and religious devotion. As Amar Alfikan, a distinguished trans-Indonesian scholar writes; "The notion of queer identity is widely used to alienate Islam in the West by demarcating US and European context as the role model for queer rights 'friendly' nations whereas the Arab world and Islam are portrayed as less 'developed' or 'less civilized.'"[3] The issues I discuss, while specific to the religious landscape of Indonesia, do not render Western non-Islamic countries, in which egregious transgressions against trans and queer lives prevail, void from criticism.

In discussing my "external" interlocutors, the majority of whom demonstrated at least some level of tolerance if not support for the queer community, let us also keep in mind that according to recent data from the "Lembaga Survei Indonesia," LGBTQI+ were ranked the least

[3] Alfikar, "The Long and Winding Road: Weaving Narrative of Queer Muslims in Indonesia," 706.

liked community in Indonesia.[4] While passive acceptance is not enough to sustain these marginalized communities, the socio-religious backdrop of Indonesia often yields this "acceptance" as a conspicuous position to take.

While the lack of activities at the school was certainly limiting, it also afforded the opportunity to situate the space within the broader community of Yogyakarta, surfacing themes of religious and national (in)tolerance that have become central to my research. Before I had the chance to enter the functioning space, it had already been presented to me through a myriad of different lenses. I have certainly questioned the amount of space I have devoted to my non-queer informants. It is those holding the identity of Muslim and *waria/transpuan* who should be staged at the forefront of a discussion of their own identities. However, in destabilizing the link between Islam and abstract political conservatism, it is useful to examine Muslim voices that both stand for and against institutions like the Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah (and for those who 'stand against,' moving beyond the mere fact of their disapproval). With this, I hope to complicate a simple notion of "opposition" by examining how certain ideological positions can be manifested in diverse and unexpected ways.

IV. Reference and Terminology

I will use pseudonyms when discussing all of my informants to protect their anonymity, particularly poignant in this context of vulnerability. While the name *waria* is identified in the name of the school, the term as *transpuan* (more directly translated to transgender and less specified to a nationally constructed embodiment of male femininity) or the English words "queer" or "LGBTQ+" were also frequently used in reference to the *santri* of the school, indexing the school as a place of gender fluidity and queerness generally outside a cultural

[4] Lembaga Survei Indonesia "Kelompok Lainnya Yang Paling Tidak Disukai," 35.

construction of *waria.* For the sake of space I will use the shorthand names for the school calling it simply the *pesantren* or *Al-Fatah* as many of my informants did in our discussions.

Because the *waria* identity is oftentimes considered to be a 'male femininity' as opposed to a fully embodied womanhood as well as the fact that the *waria* part of *Al-Fatah* expressed particularly gender fluidity within a Muslim context, I will use the gender-neutral pronouns of *they/them/theirs* in reference to all of my *waria* informants

I also want to note that the quotes I used were translated, from Indonesian to English, after the interviews took place, by someone who wasn't present during the actual conversation. It could very well be that this level of disconnect would yield a discrepancy from the quotes in this paper and what was actually communicated in that space.

V. How did the Pesantren Come to be and What Is This Being?

My fieldsite is one of convergence. Tracing Indonesian histories of the *pesantren* system, the national ideology of *pancasila*, the development of fundamentalist Islam, the locally-rooted gender identity of *waria*, and the trajectory of LGBTQ+ rights, are all imperative in an understanding of the Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah. Each of these narratives could very much warrant their own lengthy research papers so I will merely draw on them when necessary through a history of the school itself, a history that was told to me by the assistant director of Al-Fatah, who I will call Dia, on my first day at the *pesantren* and filled in through my conversations with other members and my own external research.

After looking particularly foolish circling the alleyways of the neighborhood in which the *pesantren* is located on the outskirts of Yogyakarta, I finally weave my way into the courtyard of a traditional Javanese compound. Everything is green; the walls of the houses, the jungle of

potted plants in the courtyard, the *hijab* of the person beckoning me over to sit next to them on a large shaded porch covered in bamboo mats.

They begin by telling me that this compound will not host *pesantren* activities for much longer, that at the end of August the school will relocate, likely to a partner organization, the Waria Crisis Center, a place-holder for a more permanent solution (to an issue I don't yet know). After a quick discussion of the school's immediate future they bring me to its past.

The school was established in 2008 and was initially located in the home of Ibu Maryani, one of its founders. At the time, a number of *waria* support groups, such as IWAYO, Ikatan (community) Waria Yogyakarta (established in 1984) and KEBAYA (established in 2006) had already firmly instituted themselves in the city. These organizations, however, mostly provided resources in the form of healthcare (particularly HIV related) services or legal advocacy. Supported by these pre-existing institutions, Al-Fatah accounted for a spiritual niche that needed to be filled.

One of the administrators, who had been with Al-Fatah since its founding, synthesizes the sentiment of the majority of the *waria* I talked to telling me that, "The reason we created this *ponpes* [condensed *pondok pesantren*] is because there were many *transpuan* friends coming from outside Yogja, who had a hard time finding a place to pray. Because in their communities they think they are not allowed to pray in the men's section nor in the women's section." This same informant tells me that this wasn't the case for them, because they grew up in Yogyakarta, under the impression that the bulk of discrimination *waria* face is felt most by "outsiders," a group this school could now accommodate.

When the prior leader Ibu Maryani passed away in 2014, the *pesantren* relocated to the home of Ibu Shinta Ratri, the place in which I now sat. The school ran successfully here with

bi-weekly meetings for around 4 years, until 2016, when the militant fundamentalist group, Islamic Jihad Front (IJF) gathered in front of the school demanding it be shut down with violent threats under the pretense that they were violating Islamic precepts. In our discussion of the attack, Dia tells me, "We made a report to the police but it wasn't followed up because they also think that we are not legal." Administrators had already attempted to legalize the *pesantren* as an official religious institution but the efforts had been quickly shut down by the government. Without the safety net of legal protection, activity was significantly reduced and the events that continued to occur had to be kept strictly hidden.

During this time of forced invisibility, one of the *santri* of the *pesentren* was attacked and killed. The efforts of the *pesantren* to bring legal justice to the murderer were quelled by pressure from the court. Again, in 2018, a *santri* was killed in their home. There is, perhaps tellingly, no public record of this crime, but Dia tells me that the murderer was put in jail which they attribute to the schools' advocacy. My translator relays "most cases like this will suddenly disappear" but this time, they were backed by University support, incentivizing the court to charge the perpetrator with three as opposed to two years of jail time.

These incidents didn't happen in isolation. Since 2016, LGBTQ+ Indonesian citizens have been the object of unprecedented attacks from both state officials and radical religious organizations. Presidential campaigns for the elections taking place in 2019, yielded a politically tumultuous time in which homophobia was being heavily mechanized for political support. During this period three transgender women were hosed down with a fire-truck by the local police in Lampung, Sumatra, under the justification of 'impurity cleansing.'[5] A couple months later, another group of *waria* were rejected from a town in East Jakarta after the emergence of a campaign against LGBTQ people in the area. The attacks only continued, another group of

[5] Harsono, "Indonesian Police Harass Transgender Women"

transgender women were stripped naked and beaten by dozens of Islamic fundamentalists in Banda Aceh, the provincial capital of Jakarta.[6] Legislation at the time began to reflect this violent ethos as seen in a Sumatran city passing a new regulation to fine gay and transgender citizens for "disturbing public order."[7]

The school was fortunately able to reopen in 2017 with the support of an independent legal aid organization. However, the confrontation from FJI and the frequency of hate-crimes across the nation has shifted the terms of its functioning. When I talk to the media and campaign director, they tell me that when advertising events at the *pesantren,* they share an incorrect date to avoid being targeted, keeping a list of those connected to the *pesantren* who will be told the correct information.

In February of this year, Ibu Shinta, who had become a world-renowned human rights activist, passed away. The loss of such an inspirational leader continues to be felt by the *pesantren* as well as by the Indonesian activist community at large.

The month I was in Yogyakarta was one of transition as they searched for a new director and a new space. Since Ibu Shinta's death, her family has decided to reclaim the home in which the *pesantren* is currently situated, yielding an uncertain future for the school. Administrators are currently searching for a new location that is both economically feasible and is situated in an area that will not jeopardize their security.

When I later speak with the secretary of Al-Fatah they tell me that since Ibu Shinta's death, numbers of active students have declined. Currently, there are 50-55 *santri*, 4 active teachers, as well as 3 to 4 volunteers who they say come and go. Because of the precariousness of their social standing, the help that they receive isn't commission based but is solely on the

[6] Lamb, "Stripped Naked and Beaten: Transgender Women Flee Indonesian City in Fear"
[7]France Presse, "Indonesian city to fine LGBT residents for disturbing 'public order'"

volition of community-members wanting to help. “We never recruit or promote on the internet to find teachers, but they come to us instead. First, they come to visit and chat, then they are interested in helping.”

They now meet every Sunday afternoon to pray and study the Quran. The secretary tells me that “even though the basic things of *pondok pesantren* are spiritual or religious, we also do activities beyond religion like workshops with makeup artists, massages, home farming, the *pondok pesantren* goes to campus, does social services and many other activities to empower *santri.*” The *pesantren* has afforded both a spiritual and social safe space.

VI. Supposed Incommensurability of an Al-Fatah Identity

The Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah has now been featured on distinguishing new sources such as The New York Times and Vice. Given the global recognition it has received, a surprising amount of Indonesian people that I talked to (both in passing and officially included in my study) not only had never heard about the school but were shocked to realize it was something that existed. The slew of reactions including and resembling “wow, this is really a place!?” was notable, but given the social context of Indonesia, unsurprising.

In this section, I use Tom Boellstorff’s article “Between Religion and Desire: Being Muslim and Gay in Indonesia” as a theoretical jumping-off point, discussing my own findings in congruence with and diverging from his arguments on the intersection of queerness and Islam in Indonesia.

It is necessary to note the caveat in applying Boellstorff’s theoretical framework to my own research. My *waria* informants from the *pesantren* rarely brought up sex or sexuality. The only time they did, it was about how sodomy wasn’t a transgression confined to queer spaces;

hetero couples could and did have anal sex. The application of Boellstorfs' discussion of specifically male homosexuality has the potential to be invalidating to the gender identities of the *waria* I spoke to at the *pesantren*. I am choosing to bring in this discussion because of the repeated inclusion of *waria* and *transpuan* in the categories of "queerness" and "LGBTQ" named by both those internal and external to the school. While the *pesantren* wasn't a space explicitly created for *gay* Muslims, it has demarcated itself as a space open to a general notion of queerness, and its position in the public eye is still heavily informed by beliefs on sexuality.

In his paper, Boellstorff uses the framework of "incommensurability," a term initially coined by anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli in her paper "Radical Worlds: The Anthropology of Incommensurability and Inconceivability" to explicate the experience of gay Muslims in Indonesia. He claims that "public norms render gay and Muslim 'ungrammatical' with each other."[8] According to Boellstorff, in Indonesia queer social visions and practices and Islam social visions and practices are fundamentally incompatible and thus incommensurable. Islam, being the religion of 87% of its citizens and virtually all of its dominant politicians, cannot be contained to personal belief and practice but rather foundational to the construction of the 'public norms' to which Boelstroff refers.

Through his ethnographic findings he concludes that "Gay Muslims do not necessarily feel excluded from their religion… but they imagine a life course of incommensurability in which they are gay in the gay world… and find religious community in that normal world alone."[9] The two previously segregated worlds (that of Islam and that of the queer community) are compounded at Al-Fatah. But the fact that the *pesantren* hasn't permeated the larger Muslim sphere testifies the continued relevance of "incommensurability."

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[8] Boellstorff, "Between Religion and Desire: Being Muslim and Gay in Indonesia," 576.
[9] Ibid, 577.

This paper was written three years before the creation of Al-Fatah, A time in which "there ha[d] been virtually no context in which male homosexuality has come together in the public realm."[10] Even with the creation of a queer-Muslim public that is the *pesantren* the seeming incommensurability between a normal (Islamic) world and a queer world is still baffling to many Muslim Indonesians.

When I asked one of my informants, a UGM student, why their initial reaction was one of shock, they responded; "Mainly because it's never occurred to me that those who are transgenders would feel that they are accepted in the community, that they would make their own *pesantren* or their own Islamic space. I initially thought that from the prejudice you receive that you would generally exclude yourself from, or not associate with this community. So it was just like, 'Oh my God!'"

For this student, it seems counterintuitive that the reaction to a rejection from Islam would be a further embrace of it. The prejudice they noted indeed has been evidenced in repeated hate-crimes enacted against queer people in the name of Islam (and if not explicitly Islam within a homophobic-public shaped by Islam). It feels all too easy to equate these attacks with Islam itself. But Islam is not a stagnant monolith defined by fundamentalist extremes.

Largely, my interlocutors do not feel rejected from Islam as a faith, and sometimes don't even feel rejected from the local religious communities in which they were raised. Oftentimes the reason they choose to worship at Al-Fatah as opposed to in their familial communities is preventative rather than reactionary. "It's not that I feel scared to pray in a public mosque, I just don't want to cause disturbance." They voice that the rejection they have faced has come from individuals who fear diversity, their faith simply is the tool with which they justify their bigotry.

[10] Boellstorff, "Between Religion and Desire: Being Muslim and Gay in Indonesia," 576.

One member of the *pesantren* notes, “Every attack that happened in Surabaya during the Il League or in *pondok pesantren*, they were all because of people who spoke in the name of Islam, not the religion itself. Religion has never taught us to hurt anybody.” In the face of these attacks abandoning faith was never considered to be an option. The prejudice the university student sees as inseparable from the religion is very clearly disconnected for *santri* at the pesantren.

Another *pesantren* administrator echoes this same sentiment; that what’s more counterintuitive than being trans in Islamic spaces, is enacting violence in Islamic space. “The actual Islam also teaches us to never hurt anyone. Telling us that we are sinners is also not right. Even though these people claim that they are Muslim, they still go on hating people. That’s just the person, not the teachings.” Here, dominant conceptions of incommensurability are inverted. This informant nudges us to consider violence as more egregiously incommensurable with Islam than gender nonconformity. Indeed, the espousal of non-violence in the Quran far outweighs the specific espousal of anti-transness.

Another one of the university students I spoke to makes the supposed incommensurability between queerness and Muslim-religiosity even more explicit through the language of hypocrisy; “I would say it's a bit hypocritical, and this is not to say that any Muslims are perfect in practice, but it's kind of in the gray area. There will always be external interests but when you are practicing religions, religiosity should be the priority. The top priority should be your piety.”

Here, in his urging to reject “external interests,” during religious practice, he poses gender expression that doesn’t align with biological sex, as falling out of the bounds of “piety.” This isn’t the case for other “external” informants such as one professor I spoke to who uses a notion of gender being excluded from piety in defense of *waria* legitimacy in Islam, stating “our

God will evaluate us on piety not on gender." My informants continued to express varying notions of "piety" in how it related to internal/emotional relationship to God and a conditioned embodiment. Gender performance is encompassed in this embodiment, albeit in different ways for both my "internal" and "external" informants

This same student not only expresses surprise at the compounding of two identities he had thought of as incompatible but stakes himself as a proponent of the active separation of queer (social and cultural) and religious worlds. "Personally, I am against transgenderism but if we are talking specifically about how the Pesantren should exist and practice the Islamic teachings, at least, if you want to identify culturally or socially with other genders, at least when you practice Islam, do it according to the Islamic law demands you to do it; with your biology."

While the fixedness of this jurisdiction has been disputed by Muslim scholars (as will be discussed in following sections) some members of Al-Fatah, actually do leave their *waria* identity at the door when they enter the *masjid*, choosing to wear a *sarong* (traditional male attire) instead of *mukena* (traditional female attire covering the head). The prayer at Al-Fatah is still organized by a traditional male-female binary; those who *choose* to wear *sarong* will stand in the front while those who *choose* to wear a *mukena* will stand in the back. Those who do choose to pray in accordance with their biological sex while, using the words of this informant, existing "socially and culturally" as other genders, don't voice that it would be sacrilegious to do otherwise.

One *waria* I spoke to who feels more comfortable wearing *sarong* instead of *mukenah* during prayer, makes clear that "it does not mean I am being inconsistent with being a *waria* but it's a matter of comfort when praying. When I wear a *mukena*… I can't focus, however I respect other *waria* who are praying in *mukena*, praying is about intention not what you wear." Here they

allude to piety as a form of intentionally and however one can best find intentionality within the male-female structure of Islam, is permissible. My informants commonly agreed that Islam necessitates binaric gendered organization and performance, but Al-Fatah offers an opening to enact agency within that structured performance.

The mere existence of this *pesantren* resists the hegemonic 'Islamic' discourse of incommensurability. For many Muslims, a legitimization of Al-Fatah requires a renegotiation of "piety," a renegotiation that both queer and non-queer Muslims in Indonesia have chosen to undertake. In the next sections I explore the means in which the inconceivable is conceived; how are conflicting understandings of religion and gender expression reconciled in Islamic spaces? Are these understandings necessarily conflicting?

VII. Islam Itself as a Pathway to Acceptance

A. Accepting Waria as Transgressive

In Indonesia, theological dissent against LGBTQ+ groups could look like joining a militant fundamentalist group, but it could also look like volunteering to be a spiritual leader for a trans-Islamic community. Many of my informants considered gender nonconformity to be an act of transgression but used fundamental Islamic ideologies of humanity to nullify the offense, and even incentivize active support. The disconnect between ideological and practical support of Al-Fatah was rendered most distinct in my conversation with a volunteer spiritual advisor to the school who I will refer to as Pak Noor.

I met this lively 71-year-old, who testifies his health by proudly telling me that he "smokes, drinks coffee, eats durian fruit leisurely," outside the *masjid* of a *pesantren* he founded in 1986. When introducing how he decided to help at Al-Fatah he kept repeating what I heard as

"hoker." We went back and forth for a while until we finally resorted to google translate. The screen read "hooker." Of course. His work as the spiritual advisor for the *pesantren* felt like the natural progression to the intensive social-justice work that he had already been intensively involved with, ranging from protecting the rights of sex workers to emergency disaster response. He tells me that his social-rights activism is directly rooted in his faith; **"**My work is derived from the God's words from *Surah Isra* verse 70, with three stressings: *pasti* (certain), *sungguh* (really), *benar-benar* (truly) to honor all fellow human beings."

Throughout our conversation he periodically left without explanation, every time he returned he would reassure me that he did *not* support the LGBTQ community, as if from the time he was away he could have changed his stance. But the emphasis on his lack of "support" was always paired by emphasis on "humanity."

> I do not support LGBT. LGBT is not allowed in Islam. Every religion rejects LGBT. Regarding the *waria pesantren*, I think that they are human and a respected creations of God. Spiritually, humans are the final expression of God's beauty and perfection. Therefore, I respect them and think that they have a right to have a religion, and also possess religious obligations. I serve to fulfill their right of having a religion

He recognizes (and doesn't reject) hadith used to invalidate queer identity but they are, in the context of his work, rendered irrelevant through an overarching notion of human perfection.

This notion draws off of an Islamic *tauhidic* paradigm of human equality, one that counteracts a vertical, linear progression from God to man to women but suggests a horizontal relationship in which all humans are creations of Allah and therefore fundamentally equal. Indonesian Professor, Yusuf Rahman applies a critical feminist lens to the concept of *tauhid,* where "no one is higher than the other before God,"[11] pointing to how "the vertical relation of

[11] Rahman, "The Feminist Interpretation on Gendered Verses and the Qur'ān-Based Activism," 301.

patriarchal framework can be considered as some kind of *shirk* and satanic logic because of the assertion that besides God, there is no other creature who is superior."[12] To position one human over the other, or further, one gender identity over the other, is to deify that other than Allah. So while *waria* are considered to be transgressive they are still considered to be manifestations of, in Pak Noors' words, "God's beauty and perfections," and therefore ultimately hold equal positions through the lens of the divine.

Pak Noor seemed to transcend mere tolerance, simultaneously denying "support" while practically "supporting" the community to the fullest extent of the word, freely offering them his time and guidance. In the same breadth, he denounces a community while expressing his utmost commitment to maintaining it. His voiced religious intolerance doesn't act as a deterrent against work that has led to his placement on the list; "*orang kafir*—the infidels; one of 200 people whose blood is halal."

I brought up my discussion Pak Noor in a later conversation with a university student. They tell me, "I wouldn't say that the spiritual adviser is doing a good thing if what he's doing is fostering their ideas and kind of cultivating the thought that they are valid in their identity. But in terms of helping them in their Islamic teaching it is something to practice. It should be ok." Again we see the denouncing of gender-nonconformity in Islam without that illegitimacy negating their right to practice the faith as would any other Muslim.

B. Accepting Waria as Non-Transgressive

While some see the *Tawhidic* paradigm as negating the fact that they are transgressing, as shown in this section, there are also those who consider *waria* not to be transgressing at all. The Islamic scripture my informants pointed to as shaping their expectations and constructions of

[12] Ibid, 302.

gender was vast. I will begin this section with one of the texts I was oriented to; thus begins the story/ies of Lut and Sodom.

The Prophet Lut was chosen to be the messenger of Allah to the city of Sodom; a populous city filled to the brim with criminals and transgressors. While they distinguished themselves by robbing passing travelers, "the most notorious act of evil committed by this corrupt nation was homosexuality."[13] No one in the world had ever practiced homosexuality before and these people flaunted their shameful conduct with pride. The Prophet Lut began spreading the word of Allah, but was received with ignorance and skepticism. He warned the people of Allah's impending punishments, they did not listen. The city was subsequently destroyed.

This is a bridged version of a story told to one of my informants, who I will call Putri, that was told to her in early *pesantren* education. This version of the story was how she initially recounted it to me and how it was recounted in an article on the website "My Islam" that she sent me after our interview. She tells me that it is this story that gets most frequently cited to showcase Allah's disapproval of queerness.

This story, along with other Quranic justifications of homophobia and transphobia, have not been void of skepticism. Islamic hermeneutics that accommodate the existence of LGBTQ community and in turn *waria santri* have been well underway. The contextual groundings of the Quran that refute the understanding of inherent rejection of queerness in scripture have been thoroughly studied by one of the *ustad* (teachers) who volunteers at the school. Putri, who I had interviewed a couple days before, comes to the interview to help me translate, and brings up her own questions on sodomy and the story of Lut.

[13] My Islam, "Story of Prophet Lut (from Quran)."

Her translated synopsis of his response is as revelatory for her as it is for me. She tells me that according to this *ustad*; "Prophet Lut has absolutely no correlation with the rejection of gender and sexual diversity, including *waria*." She continues her translation, "he then explained that the heinous actions of those people were widespread, adding that there are 78 verses in the Quran that tell about this story. The *ustad* said that in that story there were many atrocities committed by the people, such as acts of robbery, rape, and so on. The story of the Prophet Lut not only tells [us] about sexual crimes, but also other crimes, so that they get a punishment from Allah for those deeds." This interpretation diverges from the story that was initially presented to me and is notoriously presented to young students studying the Quran. In the *ustads'* contextualized narrative, homosexuality is not placed at the forefront of the crimes of Sodom. While the story has been mechanized to justify homophobia this inspective reading points to how this exclusion is not necessarily endorsed by Allah.

This differing interpretation from the dominant hegemonic narrative, has also been illuminated by other Islamic scholars. In the book *Homosexuality, Transidentity and Islam*, Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed comments on the people of Sodom saying, "these patriarchal 'sodomites' were not homosexual, in today's sense of the term, but rather, criminals who acted as though they had a droit du seigneur over all whom they considered as subaltern to their undivided power."[14] This author poses the sexual crimes in Sodom, not only as one crime amongst a slew of abominations, and even further posits the sexual crimes themselves being that of corruption and rape rather than merely homosexuality.

The story of Lut isn't the only textual interpretation that opens space queer existence. In one of my interviews with a *waria*, they point to the existence of men who have no desire to live with women represented in the Quran, to explicate the validity of their gender identity in textual

[14] Zahed, *"Homosexuality, Transidentity and Islam,"* 27.

Islam. The category they refer to is called *Ghairu ulil irbah min al-rijal*. Zahed also takes up a discussion of this identity pointing to how, "these men held a particular status within the Prophet's household, among his children and his wives (who did not have to veil themselves in the presence of these men). This suggests that early Muslims had a deep understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality."[15]

While some of those I spoke to found validation in particular narratives and figures in the Quran, many simply emphasized the 'nature' of their gender identity as part of their soul, which was an unchangeable creation of Allah. "They [those who oppose them] consider transgender to be against nature, for me, this is not true, we were naturally born this way; no one taught us to be like this, *transpuan* exist all over the world, that means we are also God's creation." Islamic ethics often emphasize diverse and varied human expressions as a sign of Allah's power. As referenced in the Quran, "Say 'Each works according to their *shakila* [innermost nature],' but your Lord is most knowing of who is best guided in way. And they ask you, [O Muhammad], about the soul. Say, 'The soul is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind has not been given of knowledge except a little.'"[16]

The *waria* I spoke to often referred to their gender identity as a god-given "gift," that they have had since birth; an attribute as opposed to neutral-negative inconvenience that one must work around to fulfill their spiritual duties let alone a forbidden transgression. As discussed earlier, the "inconvenience" posed by their gender identities can be attributed to the faulty interpretations of others. One of the spiritual leaders I spoke to even posits *waria* and those who facilitate the prayer of *waria* as receiving a greater reward from Allah, stating "In Islam, the higher the resistance, the higher the reward." For some, it's not only that *waria* have the right to

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[15] Zahed, *"Homosexuality, Transidentity and Islam,"* 36.
[16] Quran, 17:84-86.

the expression of faith but that that expression holds more weight than that of those who fall into 'conventional' gender categories.

IX. Acceptance through National Ideology

For those Muslims who struggled to locate tolerance within Islam, they often looked to national ideologies as pathways to acceptance. Indonesia as a nation prides itself on pluralism and tolerance, its official national motto being Bhinekka Tunggal Ika; Unity in Diversity.

The sprawling archipelago is centralized by *pancasila*, the foundational philosophical principles Indonesia was founded upon. The five guiding pillars were formulated by the first president, Soekarno in 1945 with Indonesia's independence from Dutch colonial rule. The first principle is the belief in the one and only God, subsequently, just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy, and to finish it off, social justice.

None of my pre-prepared questions brought up or even alluded to *pancasila* but the ideology was referenced by three different interviewees. One philosophy professor I spoke to, after outlining how textual Islam ultimately rejected *waria* and local cultures within Indonesia varied in their tolerance (exemplifying Java as being particularly harmonious as opposed to other islands like Sumatra or Souwalasi), cited *pancasila* as, indeed, unifying this diversity. "The difference in how cultures see the phenomenon of *waria* is united under *pancasila*… *pancasila* is not only rhetorical but *pancasila* is the reality of Indonesian society."

Another university professor I spoke to also cites *pancasila* as motivating tolerance; "We know that the first principle is the belief in a one and only god but we also have to accept the second principle which is about humanity, about how people accept others despite difference, and that's why our ideologies will accommodate all of these things." While using *pancasila* as a

means to evidence their nationally informed acceptance, she implicitly posits demonstration of faith at Al-Fatah as being inapplicable and even incompatible with the first principle; belief in God. Even for those whose religion is seen as sub-sufficient or transgressive within the eyes of a monotheistic God (as abstractly defined by the nation) the country demands the toleration of that practice through the second pillar; 'a just and civilized humanity.'

The notion that the second pillar necessitates a tolerant framework of the first pillar rather than the first pillar espousing tolerance in its own right was not a continuous sentiment. The philosophy professors provide an alternate consideration. He tells me; "So if you want to know about the 'Indonesian perspective' of *pancasila* to *waria* or LGBTQ, it's no contradiction, even though they have the principle of believing in God, in terms of *pancasila* the terms of believing in God means making, facilitating, and giving opportunity to religious followers to worship their god."

Under this interpretation even without the second pillar of 'humanity' Al-Fatah would be granted the right to exist under the precept of the first pillar. This first pillar, rather than demanding Indonesians to follow any unified religious law or belief (an impossible feat given the variety of jurisdictions within the diverse body of religious doctrines in Indonesia) demands the creation of accessible spaces (such as Al-Fatah*)* in which they can worship.

Theoretically, nothing can be incommensurability for national subjects who follow an officially recognized religion. This nationally fortified dogma has the practical implication of not only religious freedom (within the confines of the five officially recognized religions of Indonesia) but of active facilitation from the government to provide and protect the spaces in which to practice this religion freely.

These abstract principles are reflected in the specific articles of the constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, and it is the articles within the religious clause of the first pillar that explicitly validate Al-Fatah's existence. Article 29, paragraph 2 of the constitution, within the "Religion" chapter reads; "The state guarantees all persons the freedom of worship, each according to his/her own religion or belief."[17] It gets even more specific than that, article 28E, in the "Human Rights" chapter reads, "Every person shall have the right to the freedom to believe his/her faith and to express his/her views and thoughts, in accordance with his/her conscience."[18]

On paper, Al-Fatahs' legal right to exist is definite. However, *pancasila* as the unfaltering lived reality of Indonesian society can be called into question for those who fail to fall into the normative bounds of this society. It's hard to find a resemblance of a 'just and civilized humanity' in the fundamentalist Islamic groups' attacks on *waria*. As one of the *pesantren* administrators I spoke to clearly states, "if the government itself isn't finished yet doing their job to fight against *ormas* [mass religious organizations] it isn't possible they can give support to *transpuan*." Withholding the pillars of the constitution requires not only a passive tolerance of diverse religious spaces but an active defending of those spaces from their antagonizers.

Despite *pancasila* failing to yield sufficient governmental support to institutions like Al-Fatah it has undeniably shaped a public ethos of tolerance. This is evidenced in my conversation with a university student who tailors his actions to adhere to the general instruction of national law and ideology. He tells me that as a Muslim he has a moral obligation to inhibit the communities who don't live in accordance with Islamic teachings, but the fact that he is Indonesian alters that obligation. "I guess in terms of tolerating, letting them do what they do is something I do on the basis of the law in this country, because I am Indonesian." His words

[17] The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia, "The 1945 Constitution of Indonesia," 30.
[18] Ibid, 27.

show us how *pancasilas*' practical embodiment may fall short of its theoretical proposition but its promotion of tolerance has still permeated an Indonesian public-conscious.

X. A *Pengajian* in Practice

On Sunday, April 30, I was finally able to see the *pesantren* in practice. In the weeks that preceded this event, unable to witness activities firsthand, I constructed the school through the voices of my interviewees. At this point the space now constituted a theoretical amalgamation of nationalism, theology, culture and gender, existing in a somewhat abstract discursive realm, but not quite a practical one. As one could expect, existing in the physical space, one that felt distinctly alive, added a very necessary dimension to my understanding of the *pesantren.* In the anthropological spirit of thick-description, I am including this ethnographic vignette to situate the reader in the site central to my discussions.

The event, referred to as a *pengajian* (a general word for communal Islamic study), took place at the same time weekly meetings were usually held. However, this event was distinct in a couple of ways; it was the first meeting since the school had been on break for the two weeks following Ramadan; it was also the meeting in which the next leader of the school would be announced. These elements drew in the wider community of Yogkyakarta who supported their work; a collection of university students, scholars, social-justice advocates, inter-faith leaders and all those who held intriguing positions I didn't get the chance to find out.

I am one of the first guests to arrive but am enthusiastically welcomed into the space as a friend. "*Tali, selamat datang, silikan duduk!*" I sat on the same porch that I did on my first day in Yogkja with the group of *waria* who I had met individually over the past month. There were only

six of us but the space was filled to the brim with unfaltering laughter, relentless teasing, and physical affection. I understood maybe two words they were saying but giggled along.

I was struck by the banter, by the lightness. I realized I had in some ways been seeking out the heaviness, to reify an underlying trope that queer Muslims were agentless oppressed subjects. I considered how the '*perfect'* quote I was subconsciously searching for was one of troubling cognitive disconnect or defeating antagonism. Paining myself over hermeneutics of textual Islam inherently brimming with contradiction, I lost sight of the simplicity of this space. People loving people. And while the ease of this comradely has been made possible through grueling work against transphobia, I think that to overlook the joyousness of the community would be irresponsible.

I hope not to undermine struggle but rather to challenge the assumption that a space such as this one is only reactionary to external oppression rather than actively empowering in its own right. As Alfikar notes on the discourse of queer-Islamic intersectionality; "They must be depicted not only as 'sexual citizens' but as 'a whole human beings' whose everyday experiences cannot be captured by turning the spotlight on sexual/gender identity only."[19] The visceral love felt in the space demonstrated how the power of *pesantren* so clearly transcended issues of gender.

The porch became crowded as more people trickled in, including my friend from UGM who I earlier referred to as Putri, who would help me translate, and a woman who sat herself next to me. We instantly start gabbing. She tells me about her graduate research at the *pesantren*, pointing out people as they come in; "this one is a doctor who helped *santri* get covid vaccines, well that one, he's actually my husband" etc. I am reminded of a previous interview when an administrator told me, "while the space first and foremost serves as a spiritual and educational

[19] Alfikar, "The Long and Winding Road: Weaving Narrative of Queer Muslims in Indonesia," 712

space for *waria* and *transpuan* people it also serves to advocate for human equity more generally." By the end of the night my neighbor and I are confirmed friends with plans to get gelato the next day.

The event kicked off with a speech from the media coordinator expressing deep appreciation for all of us who have gathered here today and showcased our commitment to supporting the school after Ibu Shinta's death. The appraisal for simply showing up is overwhelming. One of the spiritual leaders of Al-Fatah then prefaces the closing activity; s*yawalan,* an Islamic tradition specific to Southeast Asia of apologizing and forgiving others. "If repentance has to do with Allah, then we do *istighfar*, asking for forgiveness at all times, especially when praying (*sholat*). If the relation is with fellow human beings: family, neighbors, friends, relations and so on, the only way to repent is to apologize directly to those concerned."

A *waria* with an elegant pink *mukena* and a man wearing a traditional Javanese *sorung* enter the *joglo* in the middle of the courtyard. I instantly recognize their face but can't pinpoint from where. As they begin their recitation I figure it out. The night before I had attended a cabaret show in Malioboro (a notorious tourist area of Yogyakarta), they had been one of the main performers and were apparently a *santri* of the *pesantren*. Drag-adjacent entertainment and performance is one of the few spaces in which *waria* identities have been given space and valuation in Indonesian society, the *masjid* is not. As witnessed in the fluidity between embodying Islam and embodying Ariana Grande, queer and Muslim spheres can exist not only side-by-side but can rather be experienced within the very same world.

After a Christian priest leads us in prayer, the new leader is appointed, the prior secretary who I had spoken to just days before. Then, the *syawalan* begins. We all stand and form two lines, my line stays in place as the line facing us begins moving from person to person. By the

end, I have taken the hands of every person in the spaces, thanked and forgiven them as we met each other with intentionality and warmth. This was perhaps the most concentrated connection I have felt with strangers. I am reminded of the Durkheimian notion of collective effervescence, a feeling of belonging and assimilation produced by collective ritual action.[20] This felt like a pretty clear-cut example.

XI. Concluding Thoughts

The visceral joy I felt after I forgave the last stranger was one that I thought could be attributed to the novelty of it all, a feeling that wouldn't be felt if I was Indonesian or Muslim. As I turned Putri, radiant as ever, I realized this surely wasn't the case. I asked her how she is feeling. "Oh my god, dreams do come true, thank you God for sending me my dreams." Her dream wasn't the creation of a space in which Islam and queerness could exist together in unquestioned totality. In our previous interview, she voiced general support for the *pesantren* but wasn't herself particularly involved in queer rights. Rather, her dream was to find a space of religious collectivity that evoked the feeling of her past *pesantren.* I asked her what she found most striking; "The vibe of it, I found that the vibe is the same as my boarding school, it's very cozy it feels like home, I feel like I am back to the place where it is right for me to be in, ok I like this place, I am going to come here again." I am reminded of the young swifties at the Pesantren Ali Maksum, how despite the intensity of their academic schedule and their overwhelming homesickness, they referred to the *pesantren* as "family."

In my prior interview with Putri she told me that she *had* previously known about the school (distinct from the other university students I spoke with). She had learned about it at the *pesantren* in which she grew up where Al-Fatah literally epitomized transgression; the name was

[20] Durkheim, "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, a Study in Religious Sociology"

used to reference any forbidden behavior. She explicitly equates two institutions whose ideologies may appear to be indisputably antagonistic with each other. The difference she notes in this space is not from a disconnect with previous Islamic teachings but rather from being welcomed as a stranger; "They welcomed us so nicely, I don't know anyone else who welcomes a stranger so nicely, just come in come in come on all are welcome, and we are just like, ok!"

The conversation I had with an *ustad* at the school in the schmoozing period after official activities ended, further illuminated Putris' reactions. We sit inside the Javanese home, adorned with golden sculptures and photos of *santri* and I ask him if he thinks about his teaching at Al-Fatah differently than his teaching in other Islamic spaces. He tells me; "There is nothing special about what I am doing here, it is the acceptance of outsiders that is different." For the first time, I think about the *pesantren* as distinguished not by its acceptance of gender nonconformity but rather its acceptance of those, like me, "outsiders," wanting and willing to learn. That night, it was openness to hosting a diverse set of advocates and organizers unified in their commitment to human rights and religious expression that marked its difference.

In an earlier interview one *waria* had told me, "We are accused of making our own new *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) about *sholat* and *waria*. We also learn the same *kitab kuning* as other *pesantren*. It's only that we are transgender and they are hetero." At its core, the space isn't starkly distant from the modes of meaning-making and feelings of collective-effervescence yielded in any Islamic space.

The *ustad* continued; "The basic principles of religion are the same, it talks about justice, freedom, respect, and human rights. Wherever it is, here, at the mosque, those values are taught." Putri agrees, reflecting that "while the structure of prayer was different, all of the meanings were the same."

It is all too easy to assume the optics of difference would yield the *feeling* of difference, to exacerbate the distance between self and other, without actually entering the orbit of this supposed other. Given the bulk of my discussions in this paper, I obviously think it is valuable to consider how Muslims come to terms with perceived incommensurability and difference theologically, nationally, and culturally.

However, it is also worth considering how physically existing in the site of this difference could render these creative grapplings less necessary than previously thought. Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah recognizes this power, opening its doors to "outsiders," perhaps the most effective tool to bridge what seemed unbridgeable.

At the end of one of my interviews, I ask one of the *santri* what they think is most important for me, and an external community at large, to know in order to most effectively support the *pesantren*. "What you can do is spread positive information based on facts that you see in the field, that is a form of support. What you write about and talked to us about is the real story. You can tell your friends that by talking to us and knowing our story at the end of the day they are all the same as us. We are human, regardless of our own background story." Friends, let us not forget these words.

XIII. Further Research

A. Studying Up

Even after my many hours of interviews, I am still left with the feeling that I have just scraped the surface. As I grappled with notions of tolerance I found myself wanting to talk to those on the more extreme end of the spectrum; to speak directly to the fundamentalists we had been continuously alluding to (knowing that in actuality if I was presented with the opportunity

to sit down with leaders of Front Jihad groups, I would feel little other than dread). Despite this theoretical dread, I think an application of a 'studying-up' anthropological approach (turning an ethnographic lens to the spaces of power that anthropologists have historically neglected) to pre-existing scholarship on Al-Fatah would be fruitful. Further ethnographic study could be conducted *within* the looming institutions (fundamental Islamic groups, the police force, the ministry of religion etc.) that shaped the terms in which the Al-Fatah could exist.

B. Pesantren as a Site of Social Activism

The *pengajian,* which functioned as a hub for intersectional activism, also led me down many paths that I would be eager to pursue further. Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah provides a leeway into an expanded notion of *pesantren* as an institution not solely serving the purpose of religious education but of progressive political mobilization. As stated earlier it brought together a diverse group committed to upholding the *pesantren's* right to exist, and by extension demonstrating a commitment to upholding the rights of marginalized groups more generally.

At the *pengajian* I was also able to connect with my neighbor/friends' husband, another student activist in Yogyakarta, with a particular interest in Muslim-Jewish relations as referenced in the Quran and manifested in contemporary perceptions amongst Indonesians. We were both eager to connect on this front; him living in a country notoriously free of Jews and myself being, notoriously, Jewish. After learning I study Environmental Anthropology he invited me to a lecture at his university on the intersection of theology and ecology through an 'eco-feminist' lens (which couldn't be more up my intellectual-alley). This single event at the *pesantren* yielded a cascade of further social and intellectual activity that I have only continued to reap the rewards of; a testament to the multi-functionality of the space.

The next day he delivers me a bag of Javanese coffee to return home with and tells me more about his organizational work in Java. It turns out he's a leftist marxist who has worked heavily in Indonesian labor rights and police brutality. What's most striking in our discussion, and unsurprisingly most relevant to my project, is his mention of Pesantren Kiri (*Kiri* roughly translating to the political left), a space of convergence between Islamic and communist education, established through his organization; The Social Movement Institute or SMI.

Here, topics such as the distribution of wealth and the welfare state can be examined alongside and in conversation with Quranic verses. If we recall the national survey I referenced at the beginning of this paper, *kommunis* (communists) take a close second to LGBTQ+ in the least-liked communities in Indonesia. The lethal stigmatization of communist sympathizers during Suharto's dictatorship has certainly continued to inform an Indonesian cultural consciousness (but this is opening another can of worms for the next proposed paper). We joke that his involvement in both the Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah *and* Pesantren Kiri is putting him on the track towards becoming public enemy number one.

I chose to begin this paper with a discussion of *pesantren* as an educational system at large. As a proponent of circles, I will end it here too. The Pesantren Kiri constitutes another space that has taken the name and core structure of *"pesantren"* and recontextualized it to forward a progressive political agenda. A more in-depth, perhaps ethnographic study of the work of SMI and Pesantren Kiri through interviews and participant observation could yield a valuable comparative study of two spaces that take on comprehensive Quranic study and focus on positive action and reconciliation. This research could further draw upon notions of post-regime "progressive-islam" using preexisting texts such as "The Feminist Interpretation on Gendered Verses and Qur'an-Based Activism" as theoretical frameworks.

This reconception of *pesantren* could be seen as a jumping-off point in which the radical notion of tolerance that the system was originally founded upon could be mechanized in the tumultuous pursuit of social equity.

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