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Afterword

Reflections on sexual rights, politics and sexuality studies in Indonesia

Dédé Oetomo and Tom Boellstorff

Introduction

This afterword takes the form of an interactive dialogue that shares the perspectives, experiences and theoretical insights of two distinguished sexuality researchers/activists who have been friends and colleagues for more than 20 years. In particular, our interlocutors reflect on sexual rights and politics, sexuality studies, and the future of sexuality research in Indonesia. In inviting Tom and Dédé to collaborate in this afterword, we are conscious of the richness that having both an emic and etic perspective gives to considerations of sexuality. Much of this dialogue was developed using Google Docs, in what proved to be a fascinating way to compose text, with at times all of us online together. Tom has written about such processes elsewhere (Boellstorff et al., 2013). In what follows, Dédé and Tom respond to questions concerning their views on sexuality and gender in contemporary Indonesia, with reference to a historical background. The dialogue questions that were posed as a starting point to initiate conversation are also included in the narrative.

Having undertaken his PhD in linguistics at Cornell University in the 1970s, Dédé Oetomo returned in 1982 to found Indonesia's first lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) organisation, known now as GAYa NUSANTARA. A leading thinker on LGBT rights, Dédé became a finalist in the selection for Indonesia's Human Rights Commissioner in 2012. Dédé has published widely in both academic fora and popular media (Holzner and Oetomo, 2004; Oetomo, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2006). Dédé's work has been instrumental in giving a voice to GLTBI, particularly concerning sexual rights. Tom Boellstorff is Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Irvine. His work constitutes the largest body of material on gay sexuality in Indonesia, with extensive publications (Boellstorff, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008, 2009; Boellstorff and Leap, 2004). Tom's work has inter alia provided rich insight into negotiations of sexual subjectivities. Dédé and Tom have been great mentors for researchers on sexuality in Indonesia, including for both of the editors of this volume.

Dialogue questions: Tom, over your many years of researching sexuality in Indonesia, what changes have you noticed most? Who is now involved in researching sexuality and how has this expanded over time? Who is still to become involved and who do we want to become involved?

TOM: It's hard to give a single answer to this question of course. I've noticed a pattern in sexuality studies and technology studies: namely, to emphasise (and often over-emphasise the novel), to claim that now, everything is different. I have written about this with regard to technology studies, where I see among other concerns a lack of understanding regarding how not everything changes, and even that which does change is shaped by its history (Boellstorff, 2014a).

In terms of sexuality research in Indonesia, there has been a great growth in quality work and a strengthening global community of researchers. There is also a wonderful growth in Indonesians producing scholarly and activist work on sexuality, but my hesitation in terming this "growth" is that as exemplified by Dédé's own career, Indonesians have actually been deeply involved in this for decades. For instance, if you look at my book *The Gay Archipelago*, I am not only engaging with mass media produced by gay and lesbian Indonesians, but also scholarly work. An example of this is my notion of "dubbing culture," where I quote from a discussion of the dubbing controversy by Dédé (Boellstorff, 2005b, p. 59; Oetomo, 1997).

While there still needs to be a greater presence of women scholars and a discussion of lesbian issues, lesbian activists and scholars have been present since the 1980s and we do not want to elide this fact. The real missing research community is the presence of *waria* scholars writing about *waria* (and other) issues. The lack of such scholars of course speaks to the oppression of *warias* in contemporary Indonesia and particularly the difficulties they face in staying in school, much less accessing higher education.

In terms of conducting sexuality research and presenting it publicly, Dédé can speak about this better than I. The role of Islam here seems to be important as people try to claim public space to speak about sexuality, and as queer Indonesians try to claim that space as well.

Dialogue question: Dédé, when you have your academic/researcher hat on, which we know is always placed firmly over your activist hat, you are a role model for many young Indonesians interested in the subject of sexuality studies and in researching Indonesian sexualities themselves. Could you share with us some thoughts on what kinds of sexuality-related research topics you think today's Indonesian university students are most engaged with or most interested in researching?

DÉDÉ: Students today in Indonesia are interested in doing research on LGBTI and associated communities, on PLHIV [people living with HIV] and on sexuality among young people. Some of the desire to conduct such research may extend from voyeuristic reasons, and this may influence their approach, particularly if they are merely curious about the sexually "exotic" other. But many researchers employ an empathetic approach. Some of the students are out

as LGBT themselves, but even in this case they are often only out to their closest friends at university. While some students are interested in such studies based on their own reading or exposure to community-based organisations, it is fair to say that most become interested because one or two of their teachers have done similar research or have contacts with community-based organisations. Surprisingly, quite a few undergraduate theses have been written at universities in Indonesia and without employing a judgemental approach.

Dialogue question: What kinds of sexuality research would you most like to promote within Indonesian academia?

DÉDÉ: I'd like to see diverse genders and sexualities studied in the context of sexuality and social life in general, not separately, which is the way some researchers continue to approach the topic. For example, there is a recent study on expressions of sexuality at weddings in North Sulawesi. At one such wedding, there were gay men who posed as *waria* wedding planners. The young men who had sex with *waria* at the wedding did not feel themselves gay, but rather they were straight men who were heterosexually married. Research should thus focus on the dynamics surrounding the fluidity of sexuality. The complex nuances involved in sex work is another topic that is under-researched in Indonesia. Within HIV programs the understanding of sexual fluidity is limited and undeveloped, and as such more research is needed on this area to enhance HIV prevention tactics.

Dialogue question: Do you feel that sexuality studies is now respected as a legitimate field of social science research in Indonesia?

DÉDÉ: Sexuality studies continue to be conducted only in rare oases, such as Gadjah Mada University (at PSKK), University of Indonesia (at PKGS) and Airlangga University (at FISIP and FIB). There are a few other places, though, usually centred around key academics such as Muhadjir Darwin at Gadjah Mada University (who continues the legacy of Masri Singarimbun), Irwan Hidayana at University of Indonesia, Ilmi Idrus at Hasannudin University and myself and Maimunah at Airlangga University. Generally speaking, though, sexuality is still seen as a taboo topic, with some universities even forbidding students from writing theses on sexuality issues. State universities in Muslim-majority areas have been dominated by Wahabi lecturers and professors since the emergence of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI). ICMI views sexuality studies with suspicion, horror and even disgust. Sexuality studies is even suspected to be a vehicle for the "promotion of homosexuality." With such popular rhetoric, it is easy to see why very few scholars dare to risk their career by going against social norms and researching sexuality.

Dialogue questions: Dédé, you made the 2012 shortlist for Human Rights Commissioner. Please tell us about your journey. Would it be fair to say that the inclusion of a prominent gay man was a step forward for Indonesia, or do you think that hindered your selection?

DÉDÉ: Mami Yuli (Yulianus Rettoblaut) and Ibu Nancy (Iskandar), both Jakarta-based *waria* activists, nominated themselves to be Human Rights

Commissioners in 2007 and they got as far as undergoing what is referred to as the fit and proper test in Parliament. Neither were selected for the post by MPs. Media reports at the time portrayed the grilling of Mami Yuli and Ibu Nancy as humiliating and full of comments on the candidates' personal shortcomings as *waria*. Mami Yuli nominated herself again in 2012, but this time Mami Yuli only got past the administrative screening (the first selection hurdle), in which 120 candidates were selected by the independent seven-member selection panel handpicked by the incumbent Commissioner. Mami Yuli apparently did not pass the battery of medical and psychological tests or the essay writing test, which were requirements in the second screening process. I passed the next two screening processes. By this time there were only 60 candidates left.

The third screening process involved another battery of psychological tests, in one of which, an interview, I explained honestly why I did not fill in the column on religion. I said it was because I do not practise any form of religion. On another screening process, a written test, I jokingly commented that the marital status column was discriminatory since I could not tick "K" (*kawin*/married) or "TK" (*tidak kawin*/not married). I quipped that there should have been a third option, "TBK" (*tidak bisa kawin*/not permitted to marry). This third screening process also involved candidates being grilled by members of the public. I found this part rewarding and exciting because the "public" invited by the selection panel, at least for my grilling, were progressive activists, such as feminists, who quizzed us on polygyny, for example, and who questioned the conflation of religion and state in the current Marriage Law (No. 1/1974).

The fourth step in the selection process was an individual interview with a panel consisting of two members of the selection panel and two former commissioners of the Human Rights Commission. This lasted around an hour and a half. The two selection panel members were Abdul Mu'ti, Secretary-General of the modernist Muslim organization Muhammadiyah, and Ati Nurbaiti, a senior editor for the *Jakarta Post* newspaper, representing Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (the Alliance of Independent Journalists). This Alliance was set up by critical journalists in the mid-1990s as an alternative to the then government-controlled Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (Union of Indonesian Journalists). The two former commissioners were Saporinah Sadli, an emerita professor of Psychology and Women's Studies at the University of Indonesia, and Enny Suprpto.

The fact that I am a gay activist only came up once, in a question from Abdul Mu'ti, who asked me if I would be able to carry out my work as a commissioner if there were daily protests by groups objecting to my selection. The question was posed in a light-hearted mood, and my answer was equally blasé. I said that I am used to such protests and threats in my daily work. More seriously, I said that as a commissioner I would receive police protection, so it should not be a problem. More serious questions were posed though about the massacre of 1965–66, for example. The panel asked me

whether if I was required to write a report on the massacre, would I incriminate General Sarwo Edhie Wibowo, the chief operator of the massacre and father-in-law of current Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono? I replied that in the case of the President, he should not be linked to the human rights violations committed by his relative. I noted though, that if Wibowo was indicted, this may affect voters' decisions as to who to elect, and moreover, that it would also compromise the chance of election if the First Lady or her younger brother, who is also an army general, ran for President in the future. I was also asked questions on effective policing and corruption.

There have been several openly gay and *waria* parliamentary candidates in general elections, for instance in 1999 and 2004. The Election Commission did not block them. I myself ran in both elections. However, none of us got enough votes to be MPs.

As I see it, when it comes to respecting and promoting gender and sexual rights, Indonesia has progressive and independent institutions such as the Human Rights Commission and the Women's Commission, and to a lesser extent a semi-governmental institution in the form of the AIDS Commission. However, the mainstream government is largely conservative. So, the Human Rights Commission selection panel could accept me as one of the final short-listed candidates.

TOM: There are two things that come up in what you've said here, Dédé, that are certainly worth brief comment. First, in your usual way you are being very modest, but you and all of the activists who have put themselves into the Indonesian public sphere in this manner are incredibly brave, and visionary to boot. From the first time I came to Indonesia, I was embarrassed by how my Indonesian friends knew about US politics (often in great detail: who was running for president, what their political views were etc.), while back in the United States I struggled to get people to get beyond their ignorance about the fourth most populous nation on earth. The history you're recounting here is so important, and not just to Indonesians: it should be preserved and shouted from the rooftops.

Second, one of the reasons the analysis you are providing there is important is because you are charting how the Indonesian state is not a monolithic entity: you can have more progressive elements running up against more conservative elements. In queer studies, there is often a tendency to talk about "the State" as if it is a single thing: the state does this, the state wants that, the state acts to ensure that so-and-so is the case. This is empirically inaccurate and your discussion above is just one illustration of that. But this tendency is not just inaccurate; it is actually politically disempowering. If you frame the state as a unitary agent, it's hard to avoid the implication that nothing short of total revolution will change anything. But when you recognise that the state is polyvocal—that it includes, as Dédé puts it, "independent institutions," "semi-governmental institutions," and the like—this opens a space to think about forms of political change that are emergent, incremental, partial, but have real consequences. In this case, that Dédé and others

have been able to go so far and gain such visibility is really a remarkable achievement whose effects continue to reverberate.

Dialogue question: Tom, you have been a global commentator on sexuality; how do you think Indonesia is faring compared to elsewhere, especially in terms of the push forward for sexual rights, and in terms of the development of sexuality research in the country?

TOM: Comparisons are always challenging, but as I've written about in the chapter "Comparatively Queer in Southeast Asia" in my book *A Coincidence of Desires* (2007a, Chapter 6), comparison can be useful intellectually and politically if done with care. To me, and here again this is a topic that Dédé can speak about with greater authority than I, it seems that since the fall of Soeharto in 1998, Indonesian society has basically moved in all directions. Like a steaming pot with the lid lifted off and the steam goes every which way. It's hard to discern a "push forward" because it seems the conservative voices have gotten stronger, but the progressive ones have as well, and other voices that don't neatly fit into a single line.

With regard to sexual rights, it seems that at least three issues are particularly important at present. First, the ongoing impact of decentralisation and regional autonomy; second, the ongoing problems with law and order, corruption, the police, etc.; and third, the tensions between certain movements in Islam and the celebration of diversity. The unwillingness or inability of the police to stop violent attacks on GLBTI Indonesians, particularly when they make claims to public space and social inclusion, is disappointing and disturbing. The irony is that the perpetrators attempt to define GLBTI Indonesians themselves as "moral terrorists" (Boellstorff, 2014b).

In terms of the development of sexuality research, the lack of funding and support for universities clearly remains an issue in Indonesia as elsewhere, and also the push for narrowly defined notions of practical education at the expense of basic research on social topics. I certainly hope there will be greater support for such research in the future. Given the importance of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in this regard, I think it is important that public health-related research be nurtured, but also research on sexuality that may not be immediately relevant to applied concerns.

Dialogue question: What does the ability of people to relatively freely study sexuality in Indonesia, compared to its more conservative neighbours such as Malaysia and Singapore, tell us about the country?

TOM: This is a very important point and a great illustration of the historicity of culture. As is well known, the common law codes that former British colonies inherited from that period of domination tended to have much harsher laws regarding sexuality than the civil law codes adopted by former Dutch or French colonies. This has legacy effects, but they are non-linear and emergent. In terms of everyday life, it is probably not true that Malaysia and Singapore are "more conservative" than Indonesia; it's more complex than that. But the existence of harsh legal regimes has social effects and various political forces can often employ those legal regimes in capricious ways. This

is one reason why the various anti-pornography laws passed recently in Indonesia are such a concern, as well as laws restricting women's rights, public displays of affection and so on.

Dialogue questions: If you were asked to develop a new research agenda into sex and sexualities in Indonesia, what issues would you focus on and what questions would you ask? What should the next steps be?

TOM: So many possible directions in which to step! Given that I have research interests in digital culture as well as sexuality, I do think there are fascinating and urgent agendas for exploring how Internet and mobile technologies are transforming (or not) sex and sexualities in Indonesia. A story I've shared in the past is how in 1995, when I was staying at Dédé's house in Surabaya, I brought him to an Internet cafe to get an email account. The details are a bit lost in the mists of time—I wasn't yet taking regular fieldnotes—but as I recall Dédé was a bit reluctant: why was I so adamant that this email thing would be useful? Fast forward 20 years, and the online is absolutely ubiquitous in Indonesia. Mobile phones have transformed society and have had the fastest rate of adoption of any technology in human history. Cultural norms are just starting to catch up and be themselves transformed. How do these technologies shape relationships between place and sexuality? How do we understand the local, regional, national and global in terms of forms and practices of desire?

Beyond the question of online technologies, I can think of at least three areas I would love to see researched (and could easily come up with 30 more). First: given my earlier work on sexuality and nation in Indonesia, I think the question of national belonging is incredibly important, not least because it brings together very theoretical questions about subjectivity on the one hand, and on the other very political questions about inclusion, rights and social justice.

Second: the gendering of sexuality remains an important topic for further research. No researcher can study everything: that is what colleagues are for. That said, the relationship between sexual subjectivities and practices of women, men, *warias* and others is a rich area for further research. Women's sexualities, including but not limited to lesbian and heterosexual sexualities, and their relation to *tomboi* and feminine genderings, have much to teach us about Indonesian society in the broadest sense. We are fortunate to have a substantial literature on these topics: more needs to be done but it is certainly sufficient for exploring further a wide range of topics. Male sexuality, including gay and other same-sex sexualities, is an area in which many important issues remain unstudied or understudied; this is particularly the case for issues that do not have a clear relation to HIV and other STI prevention. The public health model leaves many important issues marginalised. This is relevant as well for *waria* sexual and gender worlds. With regard to all these topics, questions of class, regional variation and urban/rural dynamics are just some dimensions to which further research can make important contributions.

Third, religion and particularly Islam deserves special mention as an important topic for further research. One of the greatest things I have gained from my years of engagements with Indonesia is an appreciation for the diversity and vibrancy of Islamic experience. I have been disappointed (to put it mildly) by the anti-Muslim (or simply ignorant) reactions of many of my fellow American citizens in the wake of the "War on Terror." I do not like referring to these as "Islamophobic" because at issue is not primarily an emotional response, but a discriminatory cultural logic, a system of inequality. This system of inequality not only ignores and stigmatises the millions of Americans who are Muslim, but elides the range of Islamic viewpoints and practices.

For my GLBTI colleagues and friends, I am struck by how often questions of Islam are important to their current concerns, even if they are not themselves Muslim. I have written about the complex ways gay Indonesian Muslims understand their faith and their sexualities, but obviously Islam in Indonesia is also about the public sphere, politics, society in the widest sense. The attempts of some conservative Muslim groups to claim authority to speak for Islam is concerning, as are the ways that control of women (and sexuality more generally) is often central to their interventions. How everyday GLBTI Indonesians are responding to these developments is just one area in which further research could make an important contribution.

Dialogue questions: Dédé, Tom has highlighted the significance of intersections between new technologies and changing sexualities and it would be fascinating to have some of your insights on these processes in Indonesia. While we did hope to attract contributors to the book to explore these themes, the availability of key researchers working on this area was low at this time. How important do you think virtual spaces have become for young Indonesians in forming their sexual subjectivities, meeting and interacting with potential sexual partners and love interests?

DÉDÉ: I think they are very important. We have barely scratched the surface of this phenomenon yet, though. Many people of different sexual orientations and gender identities are meeting online. For the first time ever people do not need to go the next major town or city to meet like-minded people. They can also arrange to meet within the *kecamatan* (towns). This may not be new; people have always met at public places such as marketplaces and *alun alun* (public barugas) for example. But what is new is the use of social media and the extent of the encounters now possible, and the new meaning of sexuality. One effect that this has had can be seen through the experiences of some of my students. In their anecdotal research, my students have found that the number of (young) men visiting female brothels, for instance at Surabaya's Dolly, seems to be decreasing. The new value is that it is "*memalukan*" (shameful) to pay for sex when you can get it "*suka sama suka*" (when both partners like each other). There must of course be other consequences too. This is interesting in view of the seemingly increasing conservative atmosphere in contemporary society.

I also think that in some ways the creation of online GLBTI spaces has enabled young GLBTI Indonesians to have richer experiences. At first glance,

young, novice GLBTI Indonesians do find it easier to meet other GLBTI people now, but we should probably look at it with a longer view to when these young people reach adulthood and face the pressure to be heterosexually married. Especially among young gays and lesbians I find that they think one day they'll have to be married and form a family, so the current sexual activities are probably considered by youth and society at large, as within the realm of "*kenakalan remaja*," (juvenile delinquency) or "*pergaulan bebas*" (free sex/promiscuity) and the like, and it is assumed that most youth will grow out of this phase. Among activists, we feel we have to race against time to provide useful information for this new tech-savvy generation, who still lack useful information. Online spaces have also created a somewhat new category called "*gay nonkomunitas*." This new form of community should provide an interesting space for us to think about sexuality in the future.

Dialogue question: We hear a lot about a "moral panic" surrounding the enormous escalation in mobile phone use among Indonesian youth—including actually blaming mobile phones for premarital pregnancy. What is your opinion on these kinds of moral panics that associate new technologies with sexual immorality?

DÉDÉ: This is certainly not a new phenomenon. All through the New Order years there was always this or that moral panic about the influence of television, videos and DVDs, and now it's focused on the influence of Internet and smartphones, and how these technologies are corrupting the morality of young people. I think it is part of the older generation of New Order rulers undertaking an act of "othering" the new generation and other minorities, whereas in fact it is the older generation who have the ability to shape access to these new technologies in a major way. Such moral panic focuses attention away from the sexual activities of older adults. That's why I think we need to study sexuality in its widest sense, not to slip into the same tunnel-visioned moral panic, as it were.

Closing comment: Dédé and Tom, we are incredibly grateful that you were both able to find the time in your inordinately busy schedules to contribute to this book. It would indeed have been a far less rich contribution to knowledge without the insights both of you have been able to make concerning the history, the present, and the future of sexuality and gender in Indonesia. Thank you.

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