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Local Wisdom Bridging the Urban Divide: the Integration of a Transgender Community in a Kampung of Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Darwis Khudori and Invani Lela Herliana

ABSTRACT

Since the last decade of the 20th century, we have witnessed the rise of transgender issues in public space. The questions of sexual orientation, homosexual marriage, adoption of children by homosexual couples, etc. have become subjects of public debate. Human rights activists reveal and denounce the multidimensional discrimination against LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) communities in diverse countries of the world. The phenomenon appears especially in urban areas and in countries where monotheist religions (especially Christianity and Islam) play an important role. It is well known that the formal teachings of Islam perceive LGBT persons as abnormal or a social disease and that extremist Muslims consider them as an enemy to be eradicated. So, what happens with LGBT communities when they wish to settle in a city of the Muslim world while the legislation does not recognise their existence and the extremist Muslims are very hostile to their presence? How do they take their place in a given urban structure of the Muslim world? What is the reaction of other inhabitants toward them? The paper answers those questions through a case study of the integration of a transgender community in an urban poor neighbourhood in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The case shows that the urban poor neighbourhoods are not a problem as many planners perceive, but a solution. The poor, the less educated, the workers of informal economic sectors, have implemented in a concrete action what the UN-HABITAT appeals for in its discourses: "Bridging the Urban Divide". It also shows the diversity of Islam and its penetration in Indonesia.

KEYWORDS: Urban Development, Urban Poor, Kampung, Transgender, LGBT, Waria, Islam, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Introduction

“Diversity” has been promoted in recent years as an essential condition for common well-being and a sustainable world. It is often associated with culture, language, religion, way of life, “race”, but also gender and sexual orientation. The UN declared 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity, affirming that “the variety of life on Earth is essential to sustaining the living networks and systems that provide us all with health, wealth, food, fuel and the vital services our lives depend on.”¹ In a more concrete perspective, the UN-HABITAT published its official discourses on urban development in 2010/2011 in terms of “Bridging the Urban Divide”, “Inclusive City”, “Holistic Approach”, “Harmonious Cities”, “Right-based Framework”, all around four dimensions of diversity: social, political, economic and cultural (UN-HABITAT 2008). Its objective is not to eliminate diversity but to “bridge”, to make its dimensions “equal” and to “include” them in the process of urban development.

In order to achieve a state of inclusive city, UN-HABITAT insisted that the four dimensions of equality — social, political, economic and cultural — must be implemented within a rights-based framework, and one that is easy to enforce. It also suggests that special attention must be given to any individuals or groups — including gender — in a situation of vulnerability (UN-HABITAT 2008:56-57).

The question is how far the notion of diversity is elaborated in the discourses of UN-HABITAT? Let us take the question of gender diversity. How far the UN-HABITAT classifies the elements of gender diversity? Here is the most developed discourse on gender issues:

The right to the city is also the right to a “gendered city” ensuring equal protection and realization of women’s human rights. Women’s participation in city planning and governance is critical to any balanced, equitable urban development. Municipal authorities must develop and implement policies in close consultation with women to ensure they fully benefit from the “urban advantage” — including health, education, decent employment, adequate housing, equal access to both public and private spaces, public transport, streets, sidewalks, markets, parks, toilets (both public and private), workspaces, political spaces, and community spaces, all in a safe environment (UN-HABITAT 2008:133).

It is clear that the notion of gender equality in the discourse of UN-HABITAT is limited to man and woman. Meanwhile, since the last decade

¹ UN News Center (2010), *UN opens Biodiversity Year with plea to save world's ecosystems*. <http://www.un.org/news/> Retrieved on 07/05/2011.

of the 20th century, we have witnessed the rise of transgender² issues in public space. The questions of sexual orientation, homosexual marriage, adoption of children by homosexual couples, have become subjects of public debate. Human rights activists reveal and denounce the multidimensional (social, cultural, economic and political) discrimination against LGBT³ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) communities in

² Transgender is a general term applied to a variety of individuals, behaviours, and groups involving tendencies to vary from culturally conventional gender roles. Transgender is the state of one's "gender identity" (self-identification as woman, man, neither or both) not matching one's "assigned sex" (identification by others as male, female or intersex based on physical/genetic sex). "Transgender" does not imply any specific form of sexual orientation; transgender people may identify as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, polysexual, or asexual; some may consider conventional sexual orientation labels inadequate or inapplicable to them. The precise definition for transgender remains in flux, but includes:

— "Of, relating to, or designating a person whose identity does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender roles, but combines or moves between these."

— "People who were assigned a sex, usually at birth and based on their genitals, but who feel that this is a false or incomplete description of themselves."

— "Non-identification with, or non-presentation as, the sex (and assumed gender) one was assigned at birth."

A transgender individual may have characteristics that are normally associated with a particular gender, identify elsewhere on the traditional gender continuum, or exist outside of it as "other", "agender", "Genderqueer", or "third gender". Transgender people may also identify as bigender, or along several places on either the traditional transgender continuum, or the more encompassing continuums which have been developed in response to the significantly more detailed studies done in recent years. See WIKIPEDIA, *Transgender*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transgender> Retrieved on 31/03/2012.

³ LGBT is an initialism that collectively refers to "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender" people. In use since the 1990s, the term "LGBT" is an adaptation of the initialism "LGB", which itself started replacing the phrase "gay community" beginning in the mid-to-late 1980s, which many within the community in question felt did not accurately represent all those to whom it referred. The initialism has become mainstream as a self-designation and has been adopted by the majority "sexuality and gender identity-based" community centres and media in the United States and some other English-speaking countries.

The term LGBT is intended to emphasize a diversity of "sexuality and gender identity-based cultures" and is sometimes used to refer to anyone who is non-heterosexual or cisgender instead of exclusively to people who are homosexual, bisexual, or transgender. To recognize this inclusion, a popular variant adds the letter Q for those who identify as queer and are questioning their sexual identity as "LGBTQ", recorded since 1996.

On the one hand, some intersex people who want to be included in LGBT groups suggest an extended initialism "LGBTI" (recorded since 1999). This initialism "LGBTI" is used all parts of "The Activist's Guide of the Yogyakarta Principles in Action. Furthermore, the initialism "LGBTIH" has seen use in India to

diverse countries of the world. The phenomenon appears especially in urban areas where a sufficient number of LGBT get together and in countries where monotheist religions (especially Christianity and Islam) play an important role.⁴ So, what happens with LGBT communities when they wish to settle in a city while the legislation and urban planning do not recognise their existence? How do they take their place in a given urban structure? What is the reaction of other inhabitants toward them?

This paper tries to answer those questions through a case study of a transgender community in a *kampung*⁵ of Yogyakarta. It describes firstly the geographical and historical context of the phenomenon, followed by the case study itself, and finally ended by a conclusion.

Yogyakarta Urban Civilisation

Yogyakarta is a small city in Indonesia (around 400 thousand inhabitants) compared to Jakarta (around 10 million inhabitants) or Surabaya (around 3 million inhabitants). However, it plays an important role in Indonesia due to its past and present history. It was the centre of Hindu-Buddhist Javanese civilisation leaving great monuments, such as

encompass the hijra third gender identity and the related subculture. See WIKIPEDIA, *LGBT*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT> Retrieved on 31/03/2011.

⁴ LGBT topics and Islam are influenced by both the cultural-legal history of the nations with a large Muslim population, along with how specific passages in the Qur'an and statements attributed to the prophet Muhammad are interpreted. The mainstream interpretation of Qur'anic verses and hadith condemn homosexuality and cross-dressing. In this, Islam resembles socially conservative interpretations of other Abrahamic religions such as Judaism and Christianity.

The Qur'an cites the story of the "people of Lot" (also known as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah), destroyed by the wrath of God because they engaged in "lustful" carnal acts between men.

Homosexual activity is a crime and forbidden in most Muslim-majority countries. In the Islamic regimes of Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, North Sudan and Yemen, homosexual activity is punished with the death penalty. In Nigeria and Somalia the death penalty is issued in some regions. See WIKIPEDIA, *Islam and Sexual Orientation*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_and_sexual_orientation Retrieved on 01/04/2012.

⁵ *Kampung* is Malay / Indonesian word for (1) a group of houses in urban area inhabited generally by poor people; (2) a village; (3) a smallest administrative unit within a territory. In term of urban studies, *kampung* is used to designate a traditional neighbourhood that grew and developed by its inhabitants without planning. *Kampung* is sometimes wrongly translated with slum. The difference between the two is that *kampung* (1) traditionally existed before the introduction of modern urban planning; (2) is legally recognised by the government; (3) is not specifically inhabited by the poor, but by all types of socio-economical groups. So, a *kampung* is not a slum. But a slum may become a *kampung*.

the Borobudur and Prambanan temples, which have become classical references of Indonesian history. Since the Second World War, Yogyakarta has been leading as a centre of traditional Javanese culture and at the same time a centre of modern education in Indonesia with hundreds of schools and universities where students from all over Indonesia and abroad come to study. In terms of cultural, social and spiritual lives, Yogyakarta is known as a city of Javanese civilisation characterised by religious syncretism where elements of diverse religions, especially Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, are adapted to the Javanese world view.⁶

The cultural climate and the availability of qualified human resources allow Yogyakarta to be a laboratory of societal experimentation. In the field of urban planning and development, for example, Yogyakarta was once known as a battlefield of two opposing paradigms, between professional planners and social activists, between the technocratic approach and the participatory one. The battlefield was the slum areas along the Code river passing through the city. In the name of city beautification and safety of the people, the planners proposed to the government to clean up the Code river-bank from settlements. The social activists, on the other side, led by an outstanding personality who was at the same time architect, writer and catholic priest, defended the slum inhabitants and proposed an on-site improvement instead of eviction. They lived in the slum area, among the squatters, on the Code river-bank, in order to help the people to get organised, to form a community and to improve their living conditions. The battle was culminated by a declaration of hunger strike by the social activists in case the government did not withdraw its plan. The social activists received moral and material support from the society and the media. The government withdrew its plan. The slum was transformed into a safe and beautiful neighbourhood for which it received an Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1992.⁷ Since that time, new generations of activists continue to work in the same spirit. They work in kampungs in order to

⁶ On Javanese way of dealing with religions, see for example GEERTZ Clifford (1960), *The Religion of Java*, Glencoe: Free Press; MULDER Niels (1998), *Mysticism in Java. Ideology in Indonesia*. Singapore: Pepin Press; KHUDORI Darwis (1996), "Eclectisme religieux en Indonésie" in *Revue ETUDES* no. December 1996.

⁷ See KHUDORI Darwis (1987), *Toward a Community of Liberation. A Report from a Battlefield of Social Conflict in Yogyakarta*. Rotterdam: Institute for Housing Studies, Unpublished Project Report; KHUDORI Darwis (1989), *Housing Action as a Means for Popular Development*. Rotterdam: Institute for Housing Studies, Unpublished Project Report; KHUDORI Darwis (1996), "The Hidden Meanings of Kampung Tchodé. Non-Housing in Yogyakarta, Indonesia" in *TRIALOG, A Journal for Planning and Building in the Third World*, No. 50, 3rd Quartal 1996, Karlsruhe.

promote participatory urban development, through which they work together with the kampung inhabitants in order to identify their collective problems and to find together their solutions. This article is based on a finding from the participatory action research they conducted in a kampung of Yogyakarta.⁸

In the field of social, cultural and religious issues, Yogyakarta shows its pioneering character. It is a home to Jogjakarta Interfaith Forum unifying leaders of diverse religious and spiritual movements for peace, justice and democracy. They played a crucial role in maintaining peace during the Indonesian turbulent transition from dictatorship to democracy following the fall of Soeharto characterised by ethnic and religious conflicts.⁹ In term of gender diversity Yogyakarta is a home to several LGBT communities and associations.¹⁰ Among the most outstanding phenomena of LGBT related issues is the LGBT Islamic Boarding School in which LGBT persons may learn and practice Islamic rites according to their sexual orientation.¹¹ It is not strange, therefore, that the city was the birthplace of Yogyakarta Principles. These are a set of principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. The Principles affirm binding international legal standards with which all States must comply. They promise a different future where all people born free and equal in dignity and rights can fulfil that precious birthright.¹²

⁸ The action-research was conducted in 2010 by Invani Lela Herliana in collaboration with the inhabitants of Sidomulyo kampung, especially Mr. Mujiyono, Ms Shinta Ratri and Ms Yuni Shara.

⁹ See the profile of Jogjakarta Interfaith Forum in Indonesia Peace Building Directory. http://www.direktori-perdamaian.org/english/org_detail.php?id=171 Retrieved on 31/03/2012.

¹⁰ For example KEBAYA (Keluarga Besar Waria Yogyakarta / Great Family of Transgender of Yogyakarta). <http://www.infokomunika.com/2011/11/kebaya-rumahnya-waria-dengan-hivaid.html> Retrieved on 31/03/2012.

¹¹ The LGBT Islamic Boarding School of Yogyakarta has been studied by Dian Maya Safitri in her MA thesis *Politics of Piety: Negotiating Islamic Religious Embodiment*, See CRCS (Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies), Graduate School, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2011), "Indonesian Waria: Transgender and Bodily Representation in Islam." <http://crs.ugm.ac.id/posts/forum/313/Indonesian-Waria-Transgender-and-Bodily-Representation-in-Islam.html> Retrieved on 01/04/2012.

¹² Yogyakarta Principles were adopted by the International Panel of Experts in International Human Rights Law and on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity following their meeting in Yogyakarta on November 6-9, 2006. See http://yogyakartaprinciples.org/principles_en.htm Retrieved on 01/04/2012.

This phenomenon seems to be paradoxical. At one side, the large majority of Yogyakarta inhabitants are Muslim. At the other side, the LGBT communities and associations may live peacefully. This is partly explained by the syncretic character of Javanese society. Nevertheless, a question remains to be answered: in what way are the LGBT communities integrated in society?

Waria Community in Sidomulyo

Sidomulyo is a kampung lining the Winongo River in north-west Yogyakarta, about 5 kilometres from the city centre. The land of around 7.9 ha, which is subject to flooding, was first occupied by squatters in the 1950s and 60s when a local industry developed. Early in the Soeharto regime in 1966 a State policy known as *Razia Gelandangan* (Homeless Drifter Sweeping) removed large numbers of homeless from the streets and housed them in bamboo barracks in an institution on this site known as Bina Karya. A decade later these people were moved to the northern riverbank where they mostly became the tenants of one of the original squatters. All of the land within the loop was renamed Sidomulyo (literally Becoming Prosperous). The institution was rebuilt during the 1970s in classic disciplinary institutional form, enclosed behind high walls, mixing the homeless with the mentally ill. A small number of criminally ill were incarcerated in a small prison within the grounds.¹³

As a kampung growing from a squatters' settlement, Sidomulyo shares the characteristics of poor neighbourhoods. There are 60 families (around 250 people) live in this kampung. The large majority of its inhabitants are originally migrants from diverse regions of Java, especially from rural areas where people could not survive anymore from agriculture. They did not have a chance to follow formal education in their lives. They work in the informal economic sector: pedicab drivers, street vendors, beggars, labourers, garbage-collectors, street singers, hoodlums,... In the cultural context of Yogyakarta where refinement of behaviour is a virtue, they are often considered to be ill-mannered and rude. Inside their communities, they are often

¹³ For more details on Sidomulyo, see RAHARJO Wiryono (2010), *SPECULATIVE SETTLEMENTS: BUILT FORM/TENURE AMBIGUITY IN KAMPUNG DEVELOPMENT*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Melbourne School of Design, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne; DOVEY Kim and RAHARJO Wing (2007), *Informal Settlements Field Trip – Yogyakarta*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne. <http://www.placeresearch.net/publications-pdfs/informal-settlements.pdf> Retrieved on 01/04/2012.

extroverted and expressive. However, when they interact with outsiders, they become less confident, rigid, introverted, and defensive.

It is in this kampung that a community of waria lives. Waria is Indonesian term for transgender people, derived from *wanita* (woman) and *pria* (man). Gay activist, Dede Oetomo defines *waria* as “men who imitate women in their clothing styles or mannerisms while retaining a masculine identity.”¹⁴ However, the waria community is very diverse. It includes individuals who continue to identify as male but who imitate certain feminine mannerisms, and perhaps occasionally wear makeup and women’s clothing. Others identify so closely as female that they are able to pass as female in their daily interactions in society. Some waria express that they have ‘waria soul’. They feel that they have the soul of woman but are trapped in man’s body. Around 30 waria mingle in their daily lives with the inhabitants of Sidomulyo. Why do Sidomulyo residents accept the community of waria in their kampung and treat them as other kampung residents? What are the reasons? What kind of understanding do they have?

The reason of Sidomulyo’s acceptance of waria may lie in the kampung’s history. Originally built as a settlement of the marginalized, it seems natural that Sidomulyo inhabitants accept other marginalized groups of people in their territory. While Sidomulyo’s history as a haven for the marginalized may play a positive role in its acceptance of waria, the relationship between waria and the other kampung residents relies upon a mutual understanding and respect. In Sidomulyo, waria have their own private social spaces where they can express themselves and reinforce their identities. They live closely to each other so the communal sense is built. Waria also have a volleyball court where they can practice their skill to win volleyball competitions at the city level. Moreover, waria have their own administrative autonomy. They manage their own territorial administration in coordination with kampung leaders. In terms of economic security, waria have their own group of *arisan*¹⁵ (rotating savings and credit association) with 16 members in which they each contribute 100,000 rupiah per week.

¹⁴ See Irfan Kortschak (2007), “Defining waria: Indonesia’s transgendered community is raising its profile” in Inside Indonesia, Saturday, 08 September 2007. <http://www.insideindonesia.org/weekly-articles-90-oct-dec-2007/defining-waria-08091588> Retrieved on 01/04/2012.

¹⁵ The “*Arisan*”, in many literatures known as the Rotating Savings and Credit Association (ROSCAs), is a social and informal gathering which intended as “cooperative endeavour” or “mutual help.” The main characteristics of these associations: interest is not calculated, rotation is determined by agreement or by lot, membership tends to be small, and no formal or separate officers. The members

In terms of interaction with other kampung residents, the waria community has a leader who became a public figure in the kampung as the mediator between the waria community and the kampung residents. Waria are also obliged to follow the major rule of living in kampung, namely that they are not allowed to bring a 'customer' home and into the kampung territory. Other rules implied for waria in kampung are that they are not allowed (1) to gamble; (2) to get drunk in kampung and its surroundings; (3) to dress too provocatively. If any waria breaks the rules, the kampung leader and waria community leader will sit together and discuss what action they will take in response. Apart from these special rules, waria are regarded as kampung residents like the others. This attitude of kampung residents towards waria is illustrated by Pak Pardi, the head of the neighbourhood association in which waria settle: "Waria is also God's creation and should be treated as such."

In term of legality, the integration of waria in Sidomulyo is secured by a temporary identity card. In fact, most waria fled from their home because of the family pressure or social prejudice and discrimination. Many of them did not bring personal identity papers (individual or family card) with them. Without papers, someone cannot get a job in the formal sector and will have difficulty to access public facilities (hospital, bank, school, university, etc). In Sidomulyo, the kampung leaders provide waria with *KIPEM/Kartu Penduduk Musiman* (temporary identity card) in order to protect them from police arrest or other harassment related to paperless persons.

On the other side, waria also contribute to and participate in the social, cultural and economic activities of kampung life. Waria share public toilets with other kampung residents. They shop in the same

simply get together and agree among themselves to contribute certain amount of rupiahs every week or month, each one thus receiving some agreed amount of rupiahs once during a cycle. Each person who draws the money is responsible for holding the next meeting of the association in his or her home, and of providing food and coffee for other members.

The purpose of *Arisan* is to enable members to purchase something beyond their affordability, such as a new car, kitchen appliance, or wedding gift. It enables participants to purchase items faster than they would otherwise be able to accumulate the savings without involving bank loans or credit. Other situations may also enforce people to form *Arisan* such as within government extensions and organizations, and migration.

Arisan is popular across all Indonesian social groups. They are particularly popular among housewives and upper class women who enjoy the social aspect. Some Arisan groups in Jakarta have grown into an exhibit of wealth featuring a "Who's Who" of high society. See WIKIPEDIA, *Arisan*. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arisan> Retrieved on 01/04/2012.

grocery stall. Some waria even go washing in the river like the other residents of Sidomulyo. Waria often participate in creative activities of kampung feasts through singing, dancing and other artistries. Waria perform regularly in kampung ceremonies and festivals. For example, when someone passes away, waria come to the funeral. When there is a wedding ceremony, they come to the reception, and so on. In term of economy, the existence of waria in Sidomulyo increases the economic flow among the small-scale home industries, like food stall, grocery stall, boarding house, etc. Kampung residents even receive additional income out of waria activities by giving waria a lift to the city at an average price of 15,000 rupiah per trip since waria admit that it is impractical for them to ride a motorcycle in a short skirt and high heels.

Conclusion

The case of waria in Sidomulyo gives us several lessons.

In the field of urban planning and development, the urban poor neighbourhoods are not a problem as many planners perceive, but a solution. They allow the poor not only to have access to housing that they cannot afford through the market, but also to contribute an innovation in societal life. While Indonesian State and government as well as UN do not provide any legislation on transgender people, kampung Sidomulyo has taken initiative to integrate waria in its territory. It is clear that its initiative is not based on economic, political or religious interests, but simply on the logic of survival, of common sense, of peace, of solidarity. The kampung inhabitants, the poor, the less educated, the workers of informal economic sectors, with their "local wisdom"¹⁶, have implemented in a concrete action what the UN-HABITAT appeals in its discourses: "Bridging the Urban Divide". They have made a breakthrough in the field that the State and government do not dare to do due to the

¹⁶ Wisdom is a deep understanding and realisation of people, things, events or situations, resulting in the ability to apply perceptions, judgements and actions in keeping with this understanding. It often requires control of one's emotional reactions (the "passions") so that universal principles, reason and knowledge prevail to determine one's actions. Wisdom is also the comprehension of what is true or right coupled with optimum judgment as to action. Synonyms include: sagacity, discernment, or insight. See WIKIPEDIA <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisdom> retrieved on 10/04/2012. The term Local Wisdom is used here to represent a wisdom owned by people based on concrete experiences of life at their locality and guided by a common sense and a sense of survival, of peace, of justice, of solidarity. It is used to oppose scientific and/or academic knowledge owned by academic and professional experts based on theoretical construction.

sensitivity of the affair vis-à-vis the monotheist religions (Christianity and Islam). And this is possible thanks to their state of marginality in the mainstream society. It is difficult to imagine that the same phenomenon may happen in a middle-class neighbourhood.

In connection with the rise of the religious role in the decision-making process of public policy, which appears to be a common phenomenon in the Muslim world, the case shows once again the uniqueness of Indonesia as the biggest Muslim country in the world. It is well known that the formal teachings of Islam perceive the LGBT persons as abnormal or a social disease and that extremist Muslims consider them as an enemy to be eradicated. The Sidomulyo case shows a picture of Indonesia as a “Non-Islamic State” in the sense that Indonesia does not have State Religion and that Islamic law is not applied in public affairs. It also shows the diversity of Islam and its penetration in Indonesia. The acceptance of Sidomulyo residents, who are mostly officially Muslim, of the waria community, may be based on one or the other of the two following reasons. Either they are simply ignorant of Islamic teachings. Or they think Islamic teachings simply irrelevant with the problem. What is the exact reason? It is not the objective of this article to answer.

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