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Om toleran Om: four Indonesian reflections on digital heterosexism

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Abstract
Beginning in January 2016, an unprecedented series of anti-LGBT events took place in Indonesia, the fourth most populous nation (after China, India, and the United States) and home to more Muslims than any other country. These events were notable for the pivotal role of digital media in their articulation and dissemination. In this article, I develop the notions of 'digital heterosexism' and 'digital exclusionary populism' to reflect on how these anti-LGBT events relate to earlier dynamics of oppression in the archipelago, and their possible consequences for Indonesia's future. I focus on the shifting implications of media for subjectivity, community, and inequality – in the country that was a model for the notion of 'imagined community'. Through these reflections, I seek to illuminate continuity and discontinuity with regard to media and culture change.

Keywords
digital media, heterosexism, homophobia, Indonesia, LGBT, nationalism, populism

Prologue: the *Porseni* cancelation

Sulawesi is the eleventh-largest island in the world, with almost 20 million inhabitants. Its most populous province, South Sulawesi, is home to several ethnic groups, including the Makassarese (after whom the provincial capital, Makassar, is named) and the Bugis. Buginese culture has a long history of gender diversity, including the existence of *bissu* transgender priests dating from before the arrival of Islam (Davies, 2007; Lathief, 2004). A legacy of this history has been a relative tolerance for *warias* (very roughly, male transvestites), who exist elsewhere in Indonesia as well (Boellstorff, 2004a).

One manifestation of this relative tolerance has been South Sulawesi's annual '*Porseni*', which stands for *Pekan OlahRaga dan SENI*, or 'week of sports and arts'.

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Porsenis have been common at schools and universities around Indonesia dating back to the 1940s, associated with athletics as a form of nation building (Brown, 2008). Since 1987, *warias* in South Sulawesi have organized their own *Porseni* nearly every year; in recent years they have been named '*Porseni waria-bissu*' in recognition of *bissus*. The events have sometimes had over 1000 participants and have received official sanction. For instance, in some years the head (*bupati*) of the district in South Sulawesi where *Porseni* was held that year has officially welcomed the participants.

The 23rd *Porseni* was slated to begin on 19 January 2017, in the Soppeng district of South Sulawesi. The event had received official approval from Soppeng's *bupati* and regional legislature, and more than 600 *warias* had arrived to participate. However, on 15th January, members of some hardline religious groups protested to the regional legislature that permission for the event should be withdrawn.[1] The following day, the police expressed concern based on media coverage of the protests in the newspaper *Tribun Makassar* and a local television station. Late that afternoon, representatives from a hardline Islamic group, the *Forum Umat Islam Soppeng* (Soppeng Muslim Forum), went to the regional legislature to demand that *Porseni* be canceled. By 19th January, confusion reigned as the police claimed *Porseni* could not take place, the *bupati* seemed to imply it could, and as many as 16 religious groups were preparing a mass protest. In the end, at least one warning shot was fired as the authorities ordered the hundreds of *warias* at the venue to disperse. *Porseni* was canceled.

In the wake of this unprecedented turn of events, the organizers sought help from the regional Legal Aid Institute, but despite support from a range of civil society groups, *Porseni* was not rescheduled.[2] The pivotal role of media in these events was reinforced by the fact that on the same day of the *Porseni* cancelation, the national legislature proposed a revision to the 2002 State Broadcasting Law which would ban the broadcasting of 'programs presenting LGBT behavior'.[3] Despite concerns that what constituted 'LGBT behavior' was unclear, the law's promoters insisted it was needed – as one legislator put it – to 'maintain the morals and manners of the Indonesian people'.[4]

Introduction: digital exclusionary populisms

The *Porseni* cancelation represented another instance of a series of anti-LGBT events in Indonesia that powerfully linked media and national belonging. To explore the implications of these events, in this introduction I set out some conceptual frameworks developed throughout the essay. (The title's first three words will remain unexplained until the conclusion.)

Media, never irrelevant, increasingly influenced politics and society in the 19th and 20th centuries. Debates regarding the benefits and dangers of this influence have taken on new urgency in the 21st century, when digital media seemingly threaten politics and society themselves. In particular, online media are key to what I term 'digital exclusionary populisms' taking form around the world. Political scientists and others use the notion of exclusionary populism to identify 'a restrictive notion of citizenship that holds that genuine democracy is based on a culturally, if not ethnically, homogeneous community' (Betz, 2001: 393–394). It is not the inclusionary populism of 'us versus them' – the nation against an outside world – but the exclusionary logic of 'some of us are the

true citizens', the ostensible threat of others within. 'Digital exclusionary populism' refers to the articulation of such restrictive notions of citizenship online. Crucially, online socialities themselves can represent domains in which the exclusion occurs.

Digital exclusionary populisms are both novel and deeply historical, both vary and share key features, and are both contested and here to stay for a good while. The Trump presidency will end and the European Union will find new footing, but digital exclusionary populisms will not simply vanish. And as Trump's 'America First' rhetoric reveals, inclusionary and exclusionary populisms can coexist, each feeding off the other. Understanding these dynamics in the digital age is of the utmost importance. We need comparative analyses of digital exclusionary populisms, but such theoretical frameworks are only robust in dialogue with empirical work sensitive to cultural and historical particularity.

In that spirit, in this essay I explore a specific context, Indonesia, and a specific form of exclusionary populism, heterosexism. In service of this inquiry, I coin 'digital heterosexism' to identify digital contexts where heterosexuality, which always includes some form of gender normativity, is held up as the only proper and sanctioned sexuality.[5] Digital heterosexism shares a history with mediated heterosexism, 'heterosexism manifested in and through the processes of mass communication' (Kielwasser and Wolf, 1993: 61). But digital heterosexism is more than an updated version of mediated heterosexism, for the pivotal reason that the digital does not always take the form of media. For instance, virtual worlds are places (Boellstorff, 2015). They can contain media and can be used to mediate, but cannot be considered 'media' unless the notion is so overextended as to be meaningless.

What are the precise genealogies and workings of digital heterosexisms? What can this tell us about digital exclusionary populisms? In what follows I examine four moments of mediated heterosexism in Indonesia, taking place from the 1980s to 2017. I will attend to the emergence of specifically digital forms of heterosexism as well as broader relationships between media, sexuality, and cultural citizenship.

My decision to structure the analysis chronologically responds to the persistent tendency to downplay the historicity of the digital. The case study at hand will represent a rich context for considering questions of history, for two reasons. First, as with the digital, there has often been a tendency to deemphasize the historicity of LGBT sexualities, or reduce that history to traditional forms of nonnormative sexuality that may not be the most relevant precedent for contemporary LGBT sexualities (Boellstorff, 2005). Second, the discipline of history has always anchored the field of Southeast Asian Studies. Throughout my career, I have returned to the work of Harry Benda, John Smail, and other titans of Southeast Asian historiography. Benda famously developed the trope of 'continuity and change' to navigate what had been an enduring dilemma for historians of Indonesia and Southeast Asia more generally (Benda, 1972). His goal was first, to avoid a Eurocentric framework that presented Indonesian history in terms of concepts and chronologies originating in the West. However, he sought to avoid isolating Indonesian history, leaving us unable to account for the archipelago's long record of religious, economic, and colonial interchange with the rest of the world.

Benda's (1962) intervention was to insist that while any history of Indonesia 'must be written "from within" . . . and not in terms or periodizations derived from the history of

other parts of the world' (p. 118), the goal should be 'to chart both continuity and change, not to deny change . . . syncretism can, after all, only occur when something intrinsically new appears and has to be "syncretized"' (p. 119). Benda's colleague John Smail emphasized this approach to change could counter the colonial-era belief that Indonesian society had decayed due to Western contact. Attention to the historical record revealed instead that

> the idea of weakness and cultural decay slides away and is replaced by its opposite, a picture of a society strong and vital enough to adopt new cultural elements that appear useful to it, to grow with the times, in short to stay alive. (Smail, 1961: 91)

This rubric of continuity and change will prove effective for tracing the emergence of digital heterosexism in Indonesia, and for the general phenomena of digital exclusionary populism.

First reflection: dubbing culture

Indonesia is the fourth most populous nation in the world, an archipelago stretching further than the distance from Los Angeles to New York, with hundreds of ethnic groups and vast differences between rural villages and dense megacities. Yet the Indonesian nation is a real cultural entity, no false veneer. Indeed, when considering the perils of contemporary digital heterosexism, I cannot help but first reflect on this incredible phenomenon of 'Indonesia' itself. It was this phenomenon that helped inspire Benedict Anderson (1983), that great scholar of Indonesia, to write *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. My reflections in this essay are shaped by his analysis regarding how what he termed print capitalism 'created unified fields of exchange and communication . . . fellow-readers . . . connected through print, formed . . . the embryo of the nationally imaged community' (p. 44). *Imagined Communities* represents only one well-known example of scholarship showing how media have been pivotal to forms of national culture. In a sense, this is an unabashedly determinist argument: without media, it would not be possible to have modern nation-states marked by a sense of 'deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson, 1983: 7) – an inclusionary populism.

In *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*, Anderson's colleague, James Siegel, further explored the historical relationship between media and Indonesian nationalism. Of interest to Siegel was the colonial-era context in which Malay, later named 'Indonesian', served as a lingua franca in what was then the Netherlands East Indies. As a trade language, Malay was seen to operate 'between peoples of different languages and cultures without belonging to any of them' (Siegel, 1997: 8).[6] Siegel (1997) noted how

> the lingua franca brought not only messages from groups present in the Indies; it brought stories from most of the globe as well. This moment has been seen to be the beginning of Indonesian nationalism. It is important to see that this nationalism began not in the nation and not with the colonial forces but with the reception of messages from Europe and Asia, from nearly all over the world. (p. 6)

He emphasized how nationalism 'domesticates desire, confining it within forms that produce recognition' (Siegel, 1997: 9). Desire plays a pivotal role in fusing Anderson's 'deep, horizontal comradeship' of the national imagined community with subjectivity – with the dynamics of recognition itself. This role of desire in recognition, in national belonging, is linked to ethnicity but not reducible to it.

To explore these questions in more depth, Siegel focused the theme of 'love sickness', which was common in Indonesian novels written during the early 20th-century independence struggle. In these narratives, the 'cure for love sickness' is

> proper recognition, that is, recognizing [love] for what it is: the power to compel recognition. More precisely, it is the power to compel recognition of desire transformed into idealism. That idealism is directed towards the advancement of the Indonesian people. At that time, this meant not independence and not equality. It meant rather the possibility of having a certain identity. One which marked one as progressive. A progressive person was in touch with the modern world outside the Indies. (Siegel, 1997: 146)

The protagonists of these novels were male, and Siegel (1997) noted in passing that this love 'is possible only with proper women and is subject to recognition by the proper authorities' (p. 146).

My own ethnographic work with *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians picks up the analytical trajectory of Anderson, Siegel, and other scholars, taking as a point of departure what Siegel never explicitly discusses: the desire he notes as foundational to national recognition, 'possible only with proper women', is a *heteronormative* desire. Heterosexuality is woven into the very core of the nation-state form. In addition, media from newspapers and novels to television, radio, and movies play an important role in the constitution and articulation of this heteronormative desire. For this very reason, national heteronormativity is powerfully shaped by, as Siegel discussed earlier, 'the reception of messages . . . from nearly all over the world'.

How could some Indonesians come to see themselves as *gay* or *lesbi* given this context of mediated heterosexism? In my work, building on the scholarship of many talented colleagues in Indonesia and elsewhere, I have explored how the *gay* and *lesbi* subject-positions took form in the context of national heteronormativity (see Boellstorff, 2005, 2007a). While forms of same-sex desire and sexual practice have long existed throughout the archipelago, Indonesians only began identifying as *gay* or *lesbi* in significant numbers in the 1980s. Notably, from the beginning *gay* and *lesbi* subjectivities have consistently been seen as *Indonesian*, not limited to any island or ethnic group. They have also consistently been seen as elements in a global archipelago of gay and lesbian communities.

How, in the context of a dominating national heteronormativity and the reality that most *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians never physically met gay and lesbian Westerners, did these Indonesians get the idea in the 1980s and 1990s that they could be *gay* or *lesbi*? Extensive fieldwork made it clear that with remarkable consistency, Indonesians got the idea through (pre-internet) mass media. Of particular import was that the mass media in question were presenting fragments of Western homosexual life – a brief mention in a gossip column, a minor character in a TV show that slipped past the censors. Yet these

incidental mentionings were refashioned into distinctly Indonesian sexual subjectivities. Building on a 1990s debate about translating 'foreign' television shows and movies into the Indonesian language, I coined the phrase 'dubbing culture' to identify a cultural dynamic where, like the 'dubbing' of a Japanese movie into English, two sets of meanings are held in close proximity without resolving into one – the impossible goal of translation (Boellstorff, 2003a). The translocation of ostensibly 'Western' sexual subjectivities into a context that is distinctly Indonesian thus holds more general lessons for understanding relationships between media, culture, and the nation-state.

Second reflection: political homophobia

Ethnography is a historical project. The fieldwork about which ethnographers write is past; the 'timeliness' of fieldwork lies in the enduring lessons drawn from it. I first visited Indonesia in 1992 and was lucky to conduct in-depth research between 1995 and 1998, in the final years of Soeharto's 'New Order' government, before the internet was widely available. In the late 1960s, the New Order was born from massive violence: hundreds of thousands killed, imprisoned, ostracized. Despite Soeharto's carefully groomed public image as 'father of development', violence remained a routine feature of New Order governance, including against women's movements (Wieringa, 2002).

However, understanding the significance of the events of 2016–2017 hinges on appreciating the degree to which historically political violence was not associated with non-normative gender and sexuality. *Warias* were often victims of assault, particularly if they were sex workers, but for them (as for *gay* men and *lesbi* women) the greatest threats of violence originated from within their own families. Because the Indonesian criminal code was largely derived from the colonial Dutch civil code, derived in turn from the Napoleonic Code, homosexuality was not specifically criminalized. LGBT Indonesians were hardly celebrated, but *warias* were acknowledged as part of the social fabric; *gay* and *lesbi* persons forged *gay* and *lesbi* lives alongside lives in the 'normal world' (*dunia normal*). As some organized into community groups, they would hold events like drag shows, sometimes linked to public health initiatives supported by nongovernmental organizations. By 1997, three meetings of an emerging national LGBT network had taken place. But in 1999, a planned fourth meeting of the network was canceled due to threats from right-wing Islamic groups (and an unwillingness on the part of the police to intervene). The following year, a drag show for HIV/AIDS awareness was attacked by members of a right-wing Islamic group: at least 25 participants were injured.

It was precisely because these events were so discontinuous with my fieldwork experience that I felt compelled to analyze their significance (Boellstorff, 2004b). In that analysis, I emphasized that an explanation of this violence in terms of Islam was inadequate (see also Thajib, 2017). Since the archipelago has been majority Muslim for centuries, such an explanation could not address the emergence of violence against LGBT Indonesians at this point. New extremist political Islamic movements clearly played an important role, but this could not explain the particular form of the violence, how many Indonesian Muslims accept their fellow LGBT citizens, or the fact that most LGBT Indonesians are Muslim.

Rather than a reductive explanation in terms of Islam, three elements of the violence in question are particularly relevant to the discussion at hand. First, it was consistently linked to attempts to access the public sphere and thus national belonging. Second, it was linked to media: media were the means by which the events were publicized, and anti-LGBT pronouncements appeared in the media in the wake of the violence (for instance, depicting the former United States President George W. Bush as a transvestite; see Boellstorff, 2004b: 482). Third, the events marked a transition from heterosexism (a belief that heterosexuality is the normal, proper sexuality) to homophobia (a negative emotional reaction to homosexuality that can include violence). The threat of the Indonesian nation being represented by nonnormative masculinity thus appeared as a pivotal factor shaping what I term 'political homophobia'.

Third reflection: moral terrorism

These events, unsettling as they were, were part of a cluster of anti-LGBT activity that faded away after a few months. The broad pattern of national heterosexism continued, but political homophobia did not continue to accompany it. Ten years later, however, political homophobia reappeared – with both similarities and differences to its earlier iteration. In 2010, the International Gay and Lesbian Association (ILGA) had decided to hold their Asian regional conference in Indonesia for the first time, in the city of Surabaya where one of the largest LGBT organizations (*GAYa Nusantara*) was located. Once the conference was publicized in mass media, however, hardline Islamic groups made threats against the organizers and the hotel where the conference was slated to take place. The conference was moved to another hotel, but the hardline groups protested anyway, going so far as to enter the hotel in search of conference participants, yelling that they would kill any they found. Across town, members of the hardline groups spray-painted 'gay men and lesbian women are moral terrorists' on the front gate of *GAYa Nusantara*'s office (see Boellstorff, 2014 for further discussion of these events).

There were some differences between these 2010 attacks and those discussed earlier that took place in 1999 and 2000 – the event attacked was international in scope, and had a greater visibility of lesbian women. The parallels, however, are striking. First, the pivotal role of media and the attempt by LGBT Indonesians to claim space in the public sphere. In regard to this pivotal role of media, an extremely important event was the passage in 2008 of a national 'anti-pornography' law so vague that not only media, but a range of other activities could be prosecuted as 'pornographic' (Bellows, 2011). Second, the pivotal role of hardline Islamic organizations, and the failure of government bodies to respond (in this case, ranging from the local police during the time of the violence to the National Human Rights Commission when the violence was reported to them). Third, the shift from heterosexism to a homophobia marked by the confluence of violence and emotion.

However, an important difference was the use of 'moral terrorist' (*teroris moral*). This phrase does not appear to have existed prior to the mid-2000s, and is notable for projecting the confluence of violence and emotion back on LGBT Indonesians. Rather than being the target of a kind of terrorism, LGBT Indonesians are presented as perpetrating emotional 'terror' on the Indonesian public. It is at this juncture that 'LGBT' becomes

salient as a term used both by anti-LGBT groups and by *lesbi, gay, waria*, and *priawan/ tomboi* (female to male transgender) Indonesians themselves. This acronym was not commonly used in Indonesia prior to the 2000s, save in some nonprofit and activist circles, but has now become a symbol of global connection. This is only reinforced when Indonesians follow what I term a 'logic of enumeration' that turns LGBT into LGBTI, LGBTIQ, and so on (Boellstorff, 2007b). Notably, it also indicates global connection when it takes the form 'anti-LGBT'. Anti-LGBT groups in Indonesia increasingly draw on global stereotypes to articulate their goal of exclusion, often termed 'reject LGBT' (*tolak LGBT*), a phrase that mirrors the desire long expressed by LGBT Indonesians to be accepted by society (*diterima oleh masysarakat*, see Boellstorff, 2003b).

Fourth reflection: digital state straightism

These reflections provide background for the anti-LGBT exclusionary populism that appeared in January 2016 and expanded through January 2017.[7] In keeping with the classic rubric of 'continuity and change' these events are truly unprecedented, yet in other respects recall what came before.

On 24 January 2016, the Indonesian Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education reacted to an informally distributed brochure for an LGBT student network at the University of Indonesia by calling for the banning of LGBT individuals from university campuses. The following day, the head of Indonesia's Congress supported this call by claiming 'LGBT must be banned because it does not fit in with Indonesian culture'. Within a month, the Indonesian Psychiatric Association (IPA) classified homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgenderism as mental disorders; the Vice President requested that the United Nations Development Program not fund LGBT community programs; a well-known Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) for *warias*, first opened in 2008, was forced to shut down; the Minister of Defense referred to LGBT activism as 'worse than nuclear warfare'; and the Indonesian Ulema Council called for legislation criminalizing 'LGBT activities and campaigns'.[8]

The anti-LGBT events continued. In March 2016, two men attempting to marry in Java were stopped by the local police.[9] In July and August, Indonesia's Constitutional Court took up this question of criminalization, now spearheaded by a group calling itself the 'Family Love Alliance'.[10] In August, a Presidential spokesman stated there was 'no room' in Indonesia for LGBT persons.[11] In October, Indonesian President Widodo finally spoke publicly against the wave of anti-LGBT discrimination, but his ambivalent statement included the assertion 'in Indonesia, beliefs [generally] do not allow [LGBT], Islam does not allow it'.[12] In December, a *waria* event in the Bantaeng district of South Sulawesi was canceled due to threats from university students and Islamic groups, presaging the *Porseni* cancelation 1 month later that I recounted in the Prologue.[13]

My earlier discussion indicates that for a high government official to even notice a student flyer is unusual, much less condemn it and then see the condemnation joined by a broad range of government actors and civil society groups. It is true that there is continuity: the state articulates a heteronormative stance. I have referred to this as 'state straightism' – an ideology that defines Indonesians as heterosexual and normatively gendered (Boellstorff, 2016). What differs is *the explicit and officially sanctioned exclusion*

of LGBT Indonesians from national belonging: an escalating, populist rhetoric claiming to represent the concerns of an exclusively heterosexual 'culture' (*budaya*), a public identified above all as 'Indonesia'. An important question for further research is the degree to which this deeply concerning official sanction represents not a moral panic per se, but a 'moral panic' enrolled into an attempt by the state to co-opt or mollify extremist Islamist groups.

These anti-LGBT incidents were characterized by a deep concern with media, specifically digital media. These media were taken to be the mode by which, in Siegel's terms, the reception of messages from around the world becomes internal to the Indonesian nation. In my own terms, it is a fear of 'dubbing culture', a denial of the ways in which all modern Indonesian cultural logics, including those linked to religion, nationalism, and heterosexuality, involve some 'dubbing' of cultural logics beyond the archipelago. But the pivotal role of media was not misrecognized. Indeed, within a day of the reaction to the university brochure in January 2016, a major newspaper published the story 'LGBT is a Serious Threat', which included the claim 'the LGBT community is becoming more visible on social media, including Twitter'.[14] The following month the Information and Communication Ministry, with support from a range of public figures including the popular cleric Abdullah Gymnastiar, demanded the removal of emoji depicting same-sex couples.[15] While the object of humorous derision in some quarters, this showed how digital spaces were becoming construed as part of the national imagined community – a conclusion furthered by the state's banning of Grindr and more than 80 other smartphone apps and websites used by men seeking sex with other men in September 2016.[16] In October, two men were briefly arrested after posting on Facebook an image of them kissing with the caption 'With my dear lover tonight. May our love last forever'.[17] In November, a *waria* beauty pageant was successfully held in Jakarta, but largely in secret and with a request for the audience not to share the event on social media.[18]

More traditional mass media did not escape attention. The same month as the emoji ban, the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission banned 'male effeminacy' from television shows. The following month (March 2016), legislators began work on a 'LGBT propaganda ban', claiming that 'LGBT content on the internet is a chief concern'.[19] As noted in the Introduction, by January 2017 this ban had expanded to 'programs presenting LGBT behavior'. In November 2016, the screening of a film about nonnormative gender in Sulawesi to take place at the French Indonesian Institute in Surabaya was canceled due to threats from hardline Islamic groups.[20]

Many scholars and civil rights organizations have documented and analyzed these disturbing events, calling for the state to unequivocally support the civil rights of LGBT Indonesians (e.g. Davies, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Kwok, 2016; Oetomo, 2016; Sanders, 2016; Yulius, 2016).[21] All these thinkers concluded, as have I, that the escalation of these events over more than a year indicated that more than a brochure was involved. Reactions to the 2015 legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States were widely noted, as were reactions to new legal protections for LGBT persons in other parts of the Asia-Pacific region. In that context, LGBT Indonesians could more easily serve as a political scapegoat for struggles regarding globalization and social transformation in the archipelago, including the place of Islam, itself shaped by global dynamics.[22]

Figure 1. "Om telolet Om."

It is striking to see a salient language of urgency, such that anti-LGBT forces constantly invoked notions of an 'LGBT Crisis', 'LGBT Emergency', and even 'LGBT plague'.[23] Crucially, these anti-LGBT events were linked to a broader right-wing movement that has targeted women's rights, the rights of religious minorities, and the very existence of a plural public sphere (Katjasungkana and Wieringa, 2016; Paramaditha, 2016; Postill and Epafras, in press). LGBT Indonesians can serve as 'canary in the coal mine' for an Indonesia that is struggling to live up to its motto of 'unity in diversity'.

Conclusion: *Om toleran Om*

Indonesians of all stripes found the 'LGBT crisis' and other political struggles of 2016 exhausting, particularly as they played out on digital media. Many observers cited this exhaustion as a reason for the emergence of a welcome distraction on digital media itself. *Om telolet Om* means roughly 'Sir, honk your horn, Sir'; children across Indonesia shout it at bus drivers so they honk their horns. In December 2016, the phrase became an unexpected viral meme, paired with images and short videos (even of a jet fighter taking off and 'honking its horn'), and becoming a popular sample used in dance music around the world (see Figure 1).[24] Even Indonesia's President and Vice President weighed in on the craze.[25]

While enjoying the cuteness of this meme, I also found it surprisingly profound. It is a call for response, for recognition. It is a literal 'hailing' in that the act of honking one's horn makes you a bus driver and the act of posting the meme makes you an included member of a digital public sphere (Althusser, 1971).

What if one called not for a blaring horn, but the caring of tolerance? What if we worked with a meme disseminated by many Indonesians: *Om toleran Om* (Figure 2)?

At last the cryptic title of this essay is explained.[26] But I hope to have indicated how a viral meme does not represent a privileged vantage point from which to grapple with the emergence of digital exclusionary populism. The work of Anderson, Benda, Siegel, Smail, and others provides tools just as valuable for considering continuity, change, recognition, and the nation as imagined community. This is why I find concepts developed in response to events of decades past helpful in thinking through these recent incidents.
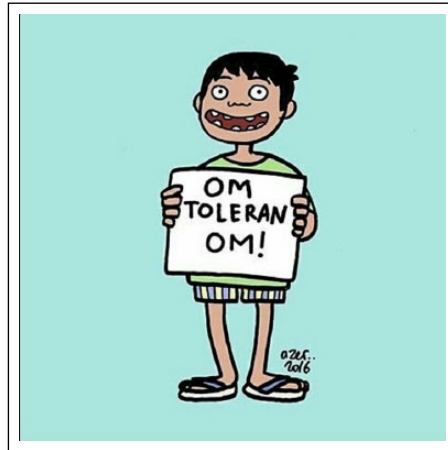
Figure 2. "Om toleran Om."

For instance, the language of 'crisis' and 'emergency' recalls earlier forms of 'moral terrorism', and the threats (sometimes carried out) of physical violence, linked to attempts to claim public space, recall earlier forms of political homophobia.

Given the pattern of relative quietude followed by new anti-LGBT events and rhetoric that I have traced for almost 20 years in this essay, it is clearly impossible to predict what the future will hold. By April 2017, anti-LGBT rhetoric seemed to have died down, but in May 2017, this was followed by some of the most anti-LGBT events of all: the public caning of two men for homosexual sex in Aceh, and the raid of Atlantis, a gay club in Jakarta in which 141 men were arrested and forced to strip naked; photographs of them were circulated on social media.[27] In addition, little in the way of pro-LGBT statements had publicly appeared, and the push to criminalize homosexuality was still moving forward both in the Constitutional Court and with proposed revisions to the national Criminal Code.[28] In December 2017, by the barest of margins, the Constitutional Court in a 5-4 ruling struck down the attempt to criminalize all sex outside of marriage (and thus all homosexuality).[29] However, any sense of a welcome respite was tempered by the sentencing that same month of 10 men arrested in May 2017 at the Atlantis Club raid. Using the 2008 Anti-pornography Law, these men received prison terms of 2–4 years.[30] LGBT activists continue to face significant threats, and everyday harassment continues.[31]

This essay represents the fourth time, over almost 20 years, that I have written about clusters of anti-LGBT incidents in Indonesia. These forms of political homophobia and exclusionary populism have caused real suffering for millions of Indonesians who are not heterosexual or normatively gendered. They have made it harder for these persons to find each other and form communities, nonprofit groups, friendships, love. They have made it harder for these persons to accept themselves, to be proud of themselves, to feel cared for and safe. They have spread senses of rejection, sin, stigma, and deviance, furthering vulnerability and marginalization.

I am tired of writing these essays: of gathering as best I can what has been documented of the oppression taking place, building on the inspiring analyses of others, working to develop concepts that will help us understand and respond to what has transpired. There is a vibrant Indonesian civil society that stands against this discrimination, that challenges the attempt to claim an interpretive monopoly regarding Islam, that reaches for a multicultural future. To repeat a quotation from the "Introduction" section, this is the Indonesia that represents 'a picture of a society strong and vital enough to adopt new cultural elements that appear useful to it, to grow with the times, in short to stay alive' (Smail, 1961: 91). I dearly hope that this side of Indonesian society will prevail, for it represents the mainstream of Indonesian aspirations for prosperity and peace. But the past 20 years indicate that we cannot assume this will be the case; uncertainty regarding when the next anti-LGBT wave will appear is one manifestation of the oppression in question.

Another factor shaping my caution (but not pessimism), is that sadly, these analyses are obviously relevant beyond Indonesia. Exclusionary populisms have gained great force in the United States and Europe, and have taken specifically digital forms. But here as well a historical perspective is warranted. Consider Stuart Hall (1988) observations on Margaret Thatcher's rise to power in Britain:

> It is a project . . . which is, simultaneously, regressive and progressive. Regressive because, in certain crucial respects, it takes us backwards . . . But don't misunderstand it. It's also a project of 'modernization'. It's a form of regressive modernization . . . What Thatcherism as an ideology does, is to address the fears, the anxieties, the lost identities, of a people . . . By the end, she said, I will be able to redefine the nation in such a way that you will all . . . feel what it is like to be part of Great Britain Unlimited . . . Britain will be great again. (pp. 164, 167)

'Britain will be great again'. Trump could not say it better himself. And Hall's notion of regressive modernization, stunningly germane to the contemporary United States, is germane as well as to the Indonesian case. As the *Porseni* cancelation indicates, part of the current anti-LGBT wave is about rejecting tradition in favor of a modernity conflated with a narrow vision of hardline Islam and an authoritarian state. But this anti-LGBT wave is also about a vision of Indonesian society shaped by the legacy of Dutch colonialism and 19th-century Victorian models of the heterosexual nuclear family.

It is the future and the past, the global and the local, the society and the self. All at once, all in flux, all at stake. To belong or to be rejected, to coexist or to exclude. It is a question of envisioning imagined communities in formation. Barring worldwide catastrophe, this envisioning will be digital and human. More precisely, it will be digital in that it is human. The digital mediates the human, but it also emplaces and even instantiates the human. What will that human being look like? That is the future to which the question of digital exclusionary populism speaks.

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Notes

1. See Pembubaran paksa Porseni Waria-Bissu se Sulawesi Selatan. *Arus Pelangi*, 20 January 2017.
2. See Porseninya dibubarkan mendadak di Soppeng, Waria Sulsel minta bantuan LBH. *Tribun Timur*, 21 January 2017. Available at: http://makassar.tribunnews.com/2017/01/21/porseninya-dibubarkan-mendadak-di-soppeng-waria-sulsel-minta-bantuan-lbh (accessed 30 December 2017); Pernyataan sikap kami atas pembubaran paksa Pekan Olahraga & Seni (Porseni) Waria-Bissu Se-Sulawesi Selatan di Kabupaten Soppeng. *GAYa Nusantara*, 21 January 2017. Available at: https://gayanusantara.or.id/2017/01/21/pembubaran-porseni-waria-bissu-soppeng/ (accessed 30 December 2017); Police ban transgender cultural event in South Sulawesi. *The Jakarta Post*, 20 January 2017. Available at: http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/01/20/police-ban-transgender-cultural-event-in-south-sulawesi.html (accessed 30 December 2017); Pembubaran Porseni Bissu/Waria: pengingkaran terhadap keberagaman budaya dan seksualitas. *Perkumpulan Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Masysarkat*, 20 January 2017. Available at: http://lbhmasyarakat.org/rilis-pers-pembubaran-porseni/ (accessed 30 December 2017); Pernyataan bersama YLBHI & 15 Kantor LBH se-Indonesia: Pembubaran paksa Porseni Waria-Bissu di Soppeng. *Arus Pelangi*, 20 January 2017; Forum Umat Islam tolak Porseni Waria di Soppeng. *Tribun Timur*, 16 January 2017. Available at: http://makassar.tribunnews.com/2017/01/16/video-forum-umat-islam-tolak-porseni-waria-di-soppeng (accessed 30 December 2017); Guru besar UNM ini sayangkan Porseni Waria di Soppeng dibubarkan, ini alasannya. *Tribun Makassar*, 22 January 2017. Available at: http://makassar.tribunnews.com/2017/01/22/guru-besar-unm-ini-sayangkan-porseni-waria-di-soppeng-dibubarkan-ini-alasannya (accessed 30 December 2017).
3. See Dispatches: Indonesia censors LGBT Radio and TV. *Human Rights Watch*, 16 February 2016. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/16/dispatches-indonesia-censors-lgbt-radio-and-tv (accessed 30 December 2017).
4. See Broadcasting bill aims to purge LGBT content. *The Jakarta Post*, 19 January 2017. Available at: https://www.pressreader.com/indonesia/the-jakarta-post/20170119/281612420103548 (accessed 30 December 2017).
5. As discussed below, digital heterosexism can also be termed 'digital state straightism' (see Boellstorff, 2016; Canaday, 2003).
6. This contrasts with Malaysia, where the same language – named 'Bahasa Melayu' and later 'Bahasa Malaysia' as well – was linked to one ethnic group, the 'Malays'. A key reason for this is that the primary ethnic divisions in Malaysia, shaped by the British colonial encounter (Malays, Chinese, Indians) means that 'Bahasa Melayu' was distinct to Malay ethnicity. In Indonesia, the legacy of Dutch colonialism meant that Chinese and Indian communities were far smaller, and the key ethnic divisions were between Austronesian-speaking groups like the Javanese, Balinese, Buginese, Minangkabau, and so on. (The western half of Papua New Guinea, where unrelated languages are spoken, was not definitely incorporated into Indonesia until 1969, almost 25 years after independence, an incorporation which is still deeply contested.)
7. I discuss events of the period January to March 2016 extensively in Boellstorff (2016); I summarize that argument here.
8. See Authorities shut down Yogyakarta transgender Islamic school. *The Jakarta Post*, 21 March 2016. Available at: http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/02/26/authorities-shut-down-yogyakarta-transgender-islamic-school.html (accessed 30 December 2017); Minister:

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9. See How an LGBT panic led this village to plan an exorcism in Indonesia. *Buzzfeed*, 8 October 2016. Available at: https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/how-an-lgbt-panic-led-a-village-to-plan-an-exorcism?utm_term=.nu5VkMWLl#.boayVBNOZ (accessed 30 December 2017); Pernikahan sesama pria digagalkan polsek kepil resor Wonosobo Jawa Tengah. *Facebook* (Divisi Human Polri), 15 March 2016. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/DivHumasPolri/photos/pcb.1281764835185703/1281764658519054 (accessed 30 December 2017).

10. See Indonesia: court reviews anti-LGBT law. *Human Rights Watch*, 23 August 2016. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/08/23/indonesia-court-reviews-anti-lgbt-law (accessed 30 December 2017); Homosexuality must be criminalized to protect Indonesian values, court told. *Buzzfeed*, 23 August 2016. Available at: https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/homosexuality-must-be-criminalized-to-protect-indonesian-val?utm_term=.esrLxz0rK#.hxMD9574P (accessed 30 December 2017); Indonesia's top court weighs ban on sex outside marriage. *The Washington Post*, 27 October 2016. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/sex-is-about-to-get-much-more-complicated-in-indonesia/2016/10/25/e12db900-8f15-11e6-a6a3-d50061aa9fae_story.html?utm_term=.16423dc90af6 (accessed 30 December 2017); Indonesia is not A Sharia nation. *Huffington Post*, 29 August 2016. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/indonesia-is-not-a-sharia-nation_us_57c4408ae4b00c54015f12ce (accessed 30 December 2017); Pengamat: usul pidanakan LGBT bisa picu kekerasan di masyarakat. *Berita Benar*, 5 August 2016. Available at: http://www.benarnews.org/indonesian/berita/lgbt-mk-08052016164144.html (accessed 30 December 2017); Indonesia's top court hears case on criminalizing gay sex. *The Globe and Mail*, 3 August 2016. Available at: http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/indonesias-top-court-hears-case-on-criminalizing-gay-sex/article31268115/?cmpid=rss1 (accessed 30 December 2017).

11. See Indonesia says 'no room' for gay community. *Express Tribune*, 11 August 2016. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/1160073/indonesia-says-no-room-gay-community/ (accessed 30 December 2017); 'No room' in Indonesia for gay rights, says president's spokesman. *The Guardian*, 11 August 2016. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/11/no-room-in-indonesia-for-gay-rights-says-president-spokesman (accessed 30 December 2017).

12. See Indonesia President Jokowi defends LGBT rights. *Human Rights Watch*, 20 October 2016. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/20/indonesia-president-jokowi-defends-lgbt-rights (accessed 30 December 2017); Presiden Jokowi: Polisi harus melindungi kaum LGBT dan minoritas lain. *BBC Indonesia*, 19 October 2016. Available at: http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia/2016/10/161019_indonesia_wwc_jokowi_lgbt?ocid=socialflow_facebook (accessed 30 December 2017).

13. See Temui DPRD, Muhammadiyah Bantaeng kecam Festival Waria yang diketuai oknum PNS. *VOA Islam*, 18 December 2016. Available at: http://www.voa-islam.com/read/indonesiana/2016/12/18/47954/temui-dprd-muhammadiyah-bantaeng-kecam-festival-waria-yang-diketuai-oknum-pns/#sthash.CPtdhQBt.dpuf (accessed 30 December 2017); Festival Waria di Bantaeng panen kecaman. *Fajar*, 13 December 2016.

14. See LGBT ancaman serius. *Republika*, 25 January 2016. Available at: http://www.republika.co.id/berita/koran/halaman-1/16/01/24/o1gi281-lgbt-ancaman-serius?fb_comment_id=1259288317421000_1265791670103998 (accessed 30 December 2017).

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16. See Police call for Grindr and other gay-friendly apps to be banned in Indonesia. *The Daily Dot*, 9 September 2016. Available at: https://www.dailydot.com/irl/indonesia-grindr-ban-facebook-gay-investigation/ (accessed 30 December 2017); Indonesia Wants to Ban Grindr and Dozens of Other Gay-Networking Apps. *Time*, 15 September 2016. Available at: http://time.com/4496531/indonesia-lgbt-grinder/ (accessed 30 December 2017).

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19. See The next big LGBT 'propaganda' ban is being written in Indonesia. *Buzzfeed*, 5 March 2016. Available at: https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/indonesian-lawmakers-pre-pare-lgbt-propaganda-ban?utm_term=.lw1Rb5dMZ#.araMpevkB (accessed 30 December 2017); Government drafts ban on LGBT websites. *The Jakarta Post*, 5 March 2016. Available at: http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/03/05/government-drafts-ban-lgbt-websites.html (accessed 30 December 2017).

20. See Regarding cancelation of One Day One Struggle 2016. *GAYa Nusantara*, 18 November 2016. Available at: https://gayanusantara.or.id/2016/11/18/pembatalan-one-day-one-struggle-2016/ (accessed 30 December 2017).

21. See also Gay Indonesians on edge as incidents of brazen homophobia rise. *Voice of America*, 8 December 2016. Available at: http://www.voanews.com/a/gay-indonesians-on-edge-incidents-homophobia-rise/3628601.html (accessed 30 December 2017).

22. See Saudi Arabia quietly spreads its brand of puritanical Islam in Indonesia. *Voice of America*, 17 January 2017. Available at: http://www.voanews.com/a/saudi-arabia-quietly-spreads-its-brand-of-puritanical-islam-in-indonesia-/3679287.html (accessed 30 December 2017); Pluralism in peril: Is Indonesia's religious tolerance under threat? *The Age*, 24 December 2016. Available at: http://www.theage.com.au/world/pluralism-in-peril-is-indonesias-religious-tolerance-under-threat-20161222-gth09i.html (accessed 30 December 2017).

23. See Kaleidoskop 2016: wabah LGBT di Indonesia. *Kiblat*, 29 December 2016. Available at: https://www.kiblat.net/2016/12/29/kaleidoskop-2016-wabah-lgbt-di-indonesia/ (accessed 30 December 2017).

24. See After a divisive year, Indonesians united by silly meme. *Asian Correspondent*, 22 December 2016. Available at: https://asiancorrespondent.com/2016/12/divisive-year-indo-nesians-united-silly-meme/#QQSwaLAS7e6XdpOf.99 (accessed 30 December 2017); The bus horn heard 'round the world. *U.S. News*, 23 December 2016. Available at: https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2016-12-23/an-indonesian-bus-horn-goes-viral-around-the-world (accessed 30 December 2017); How an Indonesian onomatopoeia became a dance-music sample and a meme: The story of Om Telolet Om. *The Verge*, 22 December 2016. Available at: http://www.theverge.com/2016/12/22/14053786/om-telolet-om-dance-music-indonesia-buses-dj-snake (accessed 30 December 2017).

25. See Jokowi and Kalla give their take on 'Om Telolet Om' craze. *Jakarta Globe*, 23 December 2016. Available at: http://jakartaglobe.id/news/jokowi-kalla-give-take-om-telolet-om-craze/ (accessed 30 December 2017).

26. I thought of this phrase on my own, but soon learned that '*om toleran om*' (and the variant '*om toleransi om*') have been widely disseminated as memes.

27. See The Public flogging of two gay men and what it says about Indonesia's future. *The Guardian*, 27 May 2017. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/27/the-public-flogging-of-two-gay-men-and-what-it-says-about-indonesias-future (accessed 30 December 2017); Indonesian police arrest 141 men over 'gay sex party'. *BBC*, 22 May 2017. Available at: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-39996508 (accessed 30 December 2017).

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31. See Report: attacks on LGBT rights defenders escalating in Indonesia. *Front Line Defenders*, 6 December 2017 (accessed 30 December 2017); Vigilantes stalk Indonesian transgender women. *Human Rights Watch*, 18 December 2017 (accessed 30 December 2017).

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