"Am I human enough in your eyes?" The Struggle of *Waria* to Integrate into The Traditional Javanese-Islamic Neighbourhood in Yogyakarta

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To my grandmothers, Simbah and Budhe Elly, who have constantly shown the world what it means to struggle tirelessly and to love compassionately.

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List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ANBTI	Aliansi Nasional Bhinneka Tunggal Ika
ASEAN	The Association of South East Asian Nations
CRCS	Centre for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies
GWL-INA	Gay, Waria, dan Lesbian Indonesia
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus infection
IIS	Insitute of International Studies
ITF	International Trans Fund
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PKBI	Persatuan Keluarga Berencana Indonesia
RSFL	Riksförbundet För Sexuellt Likaberättigande
SOGIE	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expres-sion
UGM	Universitas Gadjah Mada

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Abstract

This paper wishes to understand how and why *Pondok Pesantren Khusus Waria Al-Fatah (Islamic Boarding School only for Transvestite Al-Fatah,* shortly *ponpes),* is able to operate in Kotagede, a neighbourhood marked by traditional Javanese and conservative Islamic values. Given the fact that the *waria* community which consists of gender non-conforming individuals have been stigmatised, displaced, and dehumanised in the broader society, Kotagede seems to accept the existence of *ponpes* and allows it to actively function in the neighbourhood. I explore the interactions between *waria* and neighbours, as well as the features of Kotagede, the *waria* identity, and how these relationships intersect. It is central to this paper to understand how *waria* challenge and negotiate the normative Islamic system in Kotagede, as well as how they mitigate the dehumanisation of the community in *ponpes* to occur in the neighbourhood.

Relevance to Development Studies

By analysing the identity of waria and their struggle to integrate in Kotagede, Yogyakarta, I wish to provide a new knowledge on the table; to understand non-conforming gender subject that comes from 'The South', starting from their perspective and stories as a means of challenging the dominant Western perspective on this matter. I engage with some critical concepts in development studies, such as *queerness,* neighbourliness, everyday resistance, politics of piety, in order to understand the hegemonic power system in the setting of conservative society and how *waria* takes agentive actions to problematize and challenge it. I also seek to take part in decolonizing the knowledge of gender and sexuality by writing this paper narratively and reflectively, as it aspires to avoid 'othering the other' that have happened in many academia papers.

I posit that the relevance of this paper to development studies should caim to provide place and space for the "other worlds" to exist, or in a simple but yet strong word: pluriverse, "a world where many worlds fit" (Escobar 2015: 20).

Keywords

Waria, Neighbourliness, Queerness, The Self, Otherness, Othering, Dehumanisation, Gender, Non-conformity, Islam, Javanese.

Chapter 1 The Beginning

This chapter marks the beginning of my journey; encompassing my first encounter with the waria community *and residents in Kotagede, listening to stories from waria about the discrimination and stigmas they face, a glimpse into the story of Kotagede, and what makes this neighbourhood different from others. These stories are followed by a question that arose during my journey. A question that seeks to understand what makes ponpes able to operate in Kotagede.*

Hi, ….

Will you be at ponpes *tomorrow, Ma'am? I have arrived in Jogja. Looking forward to meet you.*

Hi, Sattwika,

Yes of course you can come to our ponpes. *Tomorrow we will also hold social services at* Keparakan Lor. *Please join and come to the* ponpes *at 1 PM so you can see and observe how we* waria, *interact with society.*

Receiving this short message brought up warm feelings—knowing that you are welcomed in a new community with people you haven't met or talked to before. I was overwhelmed with excitement, which suddenly turned into cracking nerve when she did not reply when I asked about the exact address. I was nervous that this was a refusal. But then I decided to wander alone, searching for the address based on initial information from a colleague who had written a report about *ponpes.*

I arrived in Kotagede, Yogyakarta on July 1st, 2019. It had been years since the last time I visited this city. I was still familiar with every road and corner of the city, which made it easy to find the *Pondok Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah* (roughly translated as the Islamic boarding school Al-Fatah, and further addressed as *ponpes*) though the location, if I may say, was quite secluded. I walked for 300 meters from the well-known upscale Omah Dhuwur restaurant and entered a narrow alley called *Gang Soka*. The neighbourhood was historic and stoic; remains of traditional *joglo* houses and traditional mosques stood strong. After walking down the alley for another 250 meters, I found a barbershop and turned left to find *Ponpes waria.*

The *ponpes* is located inside a small, narrow alley. People might not know that there is a big traditional *Joglo*[1] house if they do not walk to the end of the alley. I knocked but no one answered. Inside I could hear someone singing an Indonesian pop song. I knocked again, but still no one answered. Hearing me shouting a bit but too afraid to enter, a kind neighbour helped me knock on one of the *Ponpes* rooms. It seemed like he had a close relationship with the people in the *ponpes*. He knew exactly who was singing. He called, "Simbah… Simbah,"

[1] Joglo is a type of traditional house of Javanese people. The word Joglo refers to the roof of the house, which indicates the social status of the owners and is associated with Javanese aristocrats.

and suddenly the person he called Simbah stopped singing. Then Simbah came out from the room to meet me.

"Simbah[2] is also *santriwaria*[3] *living* in *ponpes*," said the neighbour. Her actual name is Rena. She is one of the *waria* who has lived in *Pondok Pesantren Al-Fatah* for years. She has witnessed how *Ponpes* developed from just a house belonging to Ratri, the founder of *ponpes,* into an affirmative space for everyone, especially the waria, to learn and study Islam.

"It has never been an easy life for us as *waria*," said Rena. "*Ponpes* enables us to pray just like the other Muslims."

Waria, the Indonesian term derived from the word *wanita* (female) and *pria* (male) and roughly translated as male transvestite, is regarded as gender identity and expression outside the dominant gender binary ideology (Boellstroff 2004: 162). There has been a great deal of stigmatization imposed on the *waria* making their lives difficult. When I finally had a chance to meet and sit with the *waria* living in the *ponpes,* one of the *waria* shared her story about how she has faced discrimination and stigma from society. "For *waria* it is hard for us to find a job or work in formal institutions. Employers won't let us dress as a woman because they only acknowledge our male bodies not our female soul*s.* So, we have to dress like men." Unfortunately, the discrimination that she has faced is not the only case to ever happen. The stigmas and judgments they face are layered and occur on a daily basis.

"They see us like walking monsters…"

A monster or an alien; that is how society mocks the *waria* community. I dedicate this section to the stories that I heard from the *waria* about the discrimination and stigmas they have been met with in society. Ayu, one of the *waria,* started telling me a story about the mocking she encountered while busking in a restaurant. She recalled that she wore a flowery dress and put on red lipstick to brighten her lips. *"*There was a mother and her child sat on a chair, staring at me. After I finished and walked around the restaurant, the mother said to me, 'Hey do not get closer to us. You're scaring my child!' I was offended. We are not monsters. We are not aliens. We are humans*,"* Ayu said when I asked her about any discrimination and mocking that she has received as a *waria.*

This mocking and discrimination emerge as the result of the othering of the *waria* as they are non-conforming with the dominant gender binary ideology, which results in the subordination of the *waria.* Due to their sexuality and queer identity, the *waria* receive discrimination from society in many aspects: from everyday life to structural exclusion, including being stigmatized as 'sinners and deviant.' In several instances the *waria* face limited access (Koenig et.al 2010:3) to formal education, social allowances, opportunities to access the market, and formal jobs. Limited access to these services results in the entrapment of the *waria* in and endless cycle of poverty.

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[2] *Simbah* is a nickname for elder people.

[3] *Santri* is Javanese term for student who learns Islam.

In her stories, Ayu highlighted how hard it is for her to access formal education due to her gender expression. Stigmatization of the *waria* has been strongly imposed by her classmates and teachers. "I was seen as deviant because I wanted to grow my hair and my nails. I tried to wear the female student uniform to school but my classmates bullied me and the school punished me. My teacher asked me, 'What do you want? If you want to continue studying here, you should 'man up' and wear the male student uniform!' I chose to keep wearing the female uniform and later I was expelled from school."

In most of cases the waria are excluded from society and are labelled as deviant due to their gender identity. This process of othering performs as "social, linguistic, and psychological mechanism that distinguish 'us' from 'them', the normal and the deviant" (Barter-Godfrey and Taket 2009: 166; Johnson *et al.* 2004; Grove and Zwi 2006). Othering follows the mechanism of 'marking' and 'naming' other, while defining the certain individual or group, resulting in social distance, marginalisation, and exclusion (Barter-Godfrey and Taket 2009: 166; Weis 1995). The process of othering entails key principles: naming, defining, marking, and this whole process results in the production of stigma. Being seen as deviant, the waria are often stigmatized, face verbal abuse, and are bullied by their classmates with demeaning jokes. Given the situation, many waria thus decide to drop out and find informal jobs to earn a livelihood and provide for themselves.

Furthermore, due to their gender expression and performativity that does not 'fit' society's gender binary, most *waria* are excluded and hardly integrate with the broader society. They are often othered by society and even their family members. Many *waria* face violence and harassment, either from strangers, neighbours, and even officers. *Waria* who work as sex worker also receive physical abuse and harassment from their clients. These biases and barriers the waria face result in a web of poverty. Other scholars have also identified links between poverty and sexuality:

> *"As a result of being marginalized and socially excluded, and as a consequence of the stigma that is culturally imposed, LGBT persons are prevented from participating in society on equal terms, for example by having limited opportunities for earning a livelihood and providing from themselves"* (Sida Action Plan 2007-2009: 2)

Given the fact that their identity is deemed as deviant and sinful, there has been a restriction to access public praying room for *waria*. In one discussion a *waria* shared her story about being kicked out of a public mosque while wearing a *mukena* (a Muslim garment worn by women) when she tried to pray. She said, "I was kicked out and not allowed to pray in that mosque. I was mad and asked them why I was not allowed to pray? I am also Muslim, and I want to pray to Allah too, just like you."

This is a frustrating condition that disproportionately affects the *waria* community. Another woman shared her story about how she too was kicked from a public mosque nearby. "I swear I won't dare to pray by myself in a public mosque. I have seen how *waria* are kicked out and I have experienced this myself. We are forced to get out and cannot step inside the mosque ever again." In a society that is rooted in heteronormative gender ideology, the *waria* do not have a place or the space to perform and express their gender identity. This form of stigmatization dehumanizes *waria*. They are stripped of their rights and restricted from practicing their religion freely.

Due to the bullying and stigma received from society, some *waria have* decided to conceal their identity. Ayu used to keep her *waria* identity a secret due to her fear of being rejected and othered. "I keep my identity as *waria* to myself because I'm afraid and ashamed if people knew that I am a *waria*." This speaks to how secrecy is used as a way to avoid being 'marked' as the Other. "Secrects are kept to protect self-identity and esteem out of fear of the consequences of revelation." (Barter-Godfrey and Taket 2009: 168)

"It is different in Kotagede…."

Nevertheless, despite the stigma and discrimination they receive from the broader society, the *waria* community is still hopeful. As a response to the difficulties they have face in regard to practicing their religion, *ponpes* emerged and still exists as a safe haven for *waria.* After being displaced by their previous house in Notoyudan, *ponpes* opened their doors in at their new house in Kotagede owned by Ratri, a native *waria* who was born and raised in the neighbourhood.

Kotagede is one of the most traditional and conservative neighbourhoodz in Yogyakarta. Emerged initially as the capital of the Islamic-Javanese kingdom, Mataram, Kotagede preserves Islamic principles and integrates them with Muhammadiyah, one of the three big Islamic councils in Indonesia. It follows its discourse, including the dominant heteronormative gender discourse. However, despite it roots in heteronormative values, Kotagede still accepts the existence of *ponpes* and its efforts to provide an 'inclusive' environment for *ponpes* to operate in the neighbourhood.

While being othered and dehumanised in the broader society, the existence of *ponpes* seems to allow *waria* to integrate in Kotagede. The local residents see the *waria* and respect them as fellow human-beings. There are neighbourly acts carried out by the *waria* and neighbours among each other. For instance, *waria* and neighbours collectively celebrate Indonesia's Independence Day in the neighbourhood and neighbours pay a visit when the *waria* community arranges a gathering at *ponpes.* These acts of neighbourliness seemingly create an 'inclusive' environment for *ponpes* to operate and integrate into the neighbourhood.

However, there are limits to this kindness in the community. While neighbours and *waria* seem to have integrated well, there are still spaces and times when the *waria* cannot interact with neighbours. This restriction revolves around religion discourse conflicting with *waria's* gender identity. At a public mosque nearby for example, the *waria* are not allowed to pray inside the unless they are 'cured' and pray as a man by donning a *sarong,* the male prayer cloth that matches their biologically male body. Moreover, they celebrate big Islamic holidays at separate ceremonies, which was done recently at this year during Eid al-Adha. The *waria* celebrated and sacrificed goats in *ponpes* instead of celebrating with the neighbours in the public mosque nearby.

What do I wish to understand?

This research paper wishes to understand how *Pondok Pesantren Khusus Waria Al-Fatah (ponpes)* is able to operate in Kotagede, a neighbourhood rooted in traditional Javanese and

conservative Islamic values. Given the fact that the *waria* community has been stigmatized, displaced, dehumanised in the broader society, Kotagede seems to accept the presence of *ponpes*. Though the community is still being othered in the neighbourhood, *warias* are seen and respected as fellow human-beings by local residents despite conflicting gender discourses. It is central to this paper to understand how dehumanisation towards the *waria* community in *ponpes* is mitigated in Kotagede.

Moreover, considering the neighbourliness (limited) in their interactions, I also seek to comprehend how do the *waria* and residents navigate their relationships in order to integrate within society. I would also like to examine in what spaces, at what times, and what acts are performed by neighbours and the *waria*. By learning this we can begin to understand if there are any conditions and/or practices that limit or restrict interactions among the *waria* and neighbours.

In this paper, I invite you to delve into the *waria* and neighbours' stories. Every chapter and subchapter will speak of its own story that comes from the *waria* community and fellow neighbours. In the introduction of the paper I presented my experiences from when I first arrived to Kotagede, my initial interaction with the *waria* and a neighbour that took me to *ponpes,* and how the othering, and the stigmas and dehumanizing behaviour that is imposed on the *waria* by society. In chapter 2 I elaborate the methodology and methods I made use of in generating the data in this paper, my position and reasons for why I chose to write my paper narratively.

In chapter 3 you will read the stories of the *waria,* how they define themselves, and what it means to be *waria*, all of which is entailed in the historiography of *waria.* In chapter 4 I share the history of *ponpes* and how it has evolved from year to year, how it dealt with a raid carried out by a Muslim hard-line group, and how it serves as a beacon of safety for connecting with God.

In chapter 5 I present the context of the neighbourhood Kotagede and how it integrates Islamic values into their rules and norms. In chapter 6 I begin with the story of everyday life in *ponpes* to provide a glimpse of their daily activities, which can be understood as a form of everyday resistance. This chapter will also further explain the sameness-otherness in their interactions, illustrating the politics of living together, the construction of gender, the categorical Self, and categorical Other. Lastly, I will discuss the intersectional aspects that mitigates dehumanisation in this setting.

Chapter 2 How do I generate knowledge?

This chapter is dedicated as a reflection and functions as an organizing principle; as my compass in this research. I contemplate how my positionality speaks and influences the knowledge produced in this paper.

At first, it all felt weird. A stranger like me, wearing a sweater and bucket hat, sitting in the corner of *ponpes*, waiting for Ratri to come out of her room. I was trying hard to look chill, although I can tell it did not work. My palms were sweating. I was so nervous to meet Ratri for the first time. While I was sitting and waiting, a woman approached me.

"Are you waiting for Ratri?" she asked.

"Uhm, yes," I answered. She nodded, and then went back to her room. It was the end of our conversation. At that moment I was too nervous to ask her name. Being in a new setting has always been interesting but at the same time it feels gawky to me. There was an awkwardness between me and *warias* at first. But it only happened on the first day. Nevertheless, soon after I established myself at the *ponpes,* I began to take part in the *ponpes'* and *waria's* life to see what they cook and learn their recipes, to listen to their conversations, to laugh and make jokes, and to help them with their makeup or dresses. They no longer feel they have to wear makeup when I am around. They saw me constantly every day for over two weeks. They ceased to be curious and interested about who I am and what I am doing. They became so used to my presence they even began to ask where I was whenever I was not around. I was no longer seen as an intruder or as a disturbing element in their daily life.

In this setting I become aware of myself as a participating observer; "outsiders who participate in some aspects of life around them and record what they can" (Bernard 2011: 260). This method falls under the qualitative approach in which I make use of in this paper.

This research paper uses qualitative data and is informed by ethnographic principles and epistemologies that depart from the intersubjectivity of knowledge production; looking at people in their cultural setting, understanding their language, symbol, and interactions as well as the shared meanings that circulate and settle in their world. This is important as I aim to understand the dynamics of everyday interactions between the *ponpes*, the *waria,* and neighbours living in the area surrounding the *ponpes*. Using an ethnographic approach, I combine participant observations, which then evolved to be participating observer, and ethnographic interviewing to collect primary data. These two methods are useful and critical to understand the personal experience. This approach also serves as a mechanism for gaining and understanding richer and in-depth explanations of the topic, and also enables me to immerse myself in the setting be studied. Therefore, this research can provide a deep and reflective understanding and exploration of the situation (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1986).

This study weaves together stories coming from eight women: Ratri, the founder of ponpes, Lily, Rena, Ayu, the three *waria* living in *ponpes,* Deta, a waria who used to live in *ponpes* but moved to another city for work, Nono, Sri, and Ufi, three neighbours living around *ponpes.* My first contact was established with Ratri prior to my arrival in Yogyakarta and I met the rest when I arrived.

I used the participant observation (and observing participant) method, combined with ethnographic interviews and in-depth interviews to incorporate their stories and opinions. Before coming to the site, I established initial contact with Ratri, the founder and religious leader in the *pesantren*. We agreed to meet in Yogyakarta in July, and I spent a full month observing and taking part in the daily lives and interactions in the *pesantren*. By using participant observations, I found interactions and non-verbal gestures that strengthened the findings that I acquired during in-depth interviews.

During my involvement and observation on site, I also conducted ethnographic interviews to complete my data gathering. Ethnographic interviews are informal interviews conducted in a natural setting with results largely coming from participant observations (Allen 2018: 2). This type of interview happens between researchers and participants who already have established relationships with the observation and often spontaneously. Ethnographic interviews aim to generate knowledge from the participant in a very natural setting and in their own words. Ethnographic interviews can help understand and make sense of certain practices or rituals by asking the person who is currently engaged to explain the meanings behind actions, customs, symbols, words, practices, etc (Allen 2018: 3).

I choose ethnographic interviews because it is helpful for understanding their experiences, perceptions and emotions. Furthermore, considering my length of stay , I conducted participant observations to establish a relationship, hence I could conduct ethnographic interviews along the way to understand the interactions between the women and the neighbours, and to make sense of certain practices, such as religious practices (*salat* and Quran recitation), choice of dress*,* neighbours' perception of *ponpes,* and how they see and understand *warias* themelves.

During my fieldwork and data gathering process, there were many unexpected interviews that happened. One day, I was starving after doing three hours of in-depth interviews with one of the *waria* in the *ponpes*. I walked through the alley and found there was one *warong* open quite late. I ordered one bowl of *indomie*. The man working there was very quiet and served it quickly. After a long silence he said to me, "It's late for a tourist to be strolling around Kotagede. Night will fall soon." As someone who easily engages in conversations with strangers, I replied, "I do not stroll much. I am just staying at the *ponpes waria* for a few hours. Have you been there?" That conversation was unexpectedly lively and continued. He told me about his perspective about these women and their beliefs, and what the neighbours think about the existence of the *ponpes*. Through this conversation, I started to understand the neighbour's views about *ponpes*. I started to get a glimpse of their perception and whether they oppose or accept the *waria* presence in their neighbourhood. Through this conversation, I was able to listen to their authentic stories in the real setting.

Nevertheless, my time was limited as I only had a month to spend at the *ponpes* with the *waria* and neighbours. I understand it is not entirely effective to rely only on participant observations and ethnographic interviews. Thus, to have a complete and deeper understanding of their stories that I listened to through conversations, I also conducted in-depth interviews with the *warias* and neighbours. For every interview, *Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah* requires the researcher or visitors to provide a donation and/or souvenirs to the interviewees, valued at roughly IDR 50,000 (€ 3,5) per person. This form of 'transactional' interviewing, however, made me reflect on our (I and the *warias)* positionality and agency. It made me think how

knowledge is partial and accessible to those who have sufficient funds to pay for an interview. There was one day when I scheduled an interview with one woman who had been living in *ponpes* for the last four years. We agreed to meet at *ponpes* at 5PM. I was on my way, hopping on a *Gojek*[4] when suddenly my phone rang. It was Ayu, one of my *waria* interlocutors. "Hi, Wika is it okay if you interview Deta instead? Riri unfortunately had to cancel the interview last minute. She has to go. Deta is also a *waria* and used to live in *ponpes* for 12 years. So, this is still relevant for you, isn't it?" she asked. At that moment, I was surprised because this sudden change was unexpected. Nevertheless, I said, "okay, see you in a bit," and rushed to *ponpes*. I had no other option. Later after a three-hour long interview, Ayu told me the real reason why Riri bailed on our meeting. "She had a meeting with a client who was paying her IDR 500,000," she told me while showing me their chat. "IDR 50,000 from the interview means nothing compared to meeting my client who pays me IDR 500,000," Riri said through chat with Ayu.

Through this experience, I reflected on how I and these women position each other and how our agency plays out in this relationship. In sharing their stories and knowledge the waria have a certain position and agency in regard to whom they *want* to share their stories and knowledge with.

How do I see myself and reflect on this study?

> *"Whether we like it or not, researchers remain human beings complete with the usual assembly of feelings, failings and moods. All of these influences how we feel and understand what is going on. Our consciousness is always the medium through which research occurs; there is no method or technique of doing research other than through the medium of the researcher."* (Stanley and Wise 1983: 157)

Departing from feminist research methodologies, I am always reminded to be aware of my positionality in every interaction during my observation and in my own writing. When presented the initial design of this research for the first time, I remembered putting down my intersecting identities; Catholic, Javanese and queer, as ethical challenges and biases that might influence the objectivity of my analysis. During my feedback session, my second reader immediately pointed out and asked, "Why would you put these as ethical challenges or biases? Isn't this what Harding and Haraway mention as situated knowledge?" At that moment, I delved into my own positionality. I reflected how my position as a Catholic, queer-bisexual would play out in my analyses. How these identities have become lenses I use to produce knowledge.

Situating knowledge is fundamental to queer research. This is important as the findings and results of this paper closely links to the researcher—*me* (Haraway 1998). As beautifully written by Donna Haraway (1998) and Sandra Harding (1991), knowledge is produced in its origins. It emerges from certain subjectivity, with its limit and partiality. Knowledge, thus, is partial and specific. This means I will not claim to solely find universality in my knowledge and within my findings and analyses. In this setting, I realise how my positionality as

[4] Indonesian online motorbike-based ride-hailing.

researcher has certain power relations and gaps with the *waria* and neighbours I talk to. I would never be able to overcome these gaps between me and them. Situating knowledge also demands us to position carefully, reflect, and acknowledge the power relations in the process of knowledge production. As Haraway points out, "How to see? Where to see from? What limits to vision? What to see for? Whom to see with? Who gets to have more than one point of view? Who gets blinded? Who wears blinders? Who interprets the visual field? What other sensory power do we wish to cultivate besides vision?"

Reflecting on that, I understand how my positionality would influence the knowledge produced through the results in my research. As a researcher, I am (and should be) aware of my position when I write and express the results in this paper.

"Translation is always interpretive, critical, and partial"

I took the above sentence from Donna Harraway (1988: 589), when I reflected on the ongoing conversations between me, the *waria,* and the neighbours. We mostly spoke and had conversations in Javanese. Some people who do not really speak this language might feel alienated as they do not understand what we are talking about. There was one day when foreign volunteers came to have discussion with Ratri. I was there to sit and listen to the discussion, but the volunteers couldn't understand what the women were saying. "Can you help me translate?" asked Ratri. I nodded and said, "Yes of course, at your service." Ratri began to speak in Javanese about the forced closure that happened in 2016. She said, "*loro ati nganthi mendhem,"* and I translated, "my heart hurts until it feels..." I was lost in the middle of my translation. I did not know the correct translation for *mendhem* in English. *Mendhem* in Javanese means drunk if translated literally into English. However, drunk is not the correct translation. *Mendhem* usually expresses a deep, hurt feeling that makes the person unable to process. Thus, I chose the word numb. I am aware that there is a different depth and nuance between *'mendhem'* and 'numb', but that is the closest word in my interpretation.

Through this conversation, I began to think how my position as Javanese plays out in this case. My situated knowledge lies in how I understand and make sense of the conversation with *waria* that mostly happened in Javanese. There are at least two translation process I had to go through: Javanese to Indonesian, and Indonesian to English. During this process, I recognized that I was in a position of privilge being able to understand the three languages; Javanese, Indonesian, and English. I am fortunate to be able choose which words match the closest meaning. If there are words that can't be expressed in one language, then I choose another word in English that might have closer meaning to the one in Javanese. Thus, in my translation, I am aware how the knowledge production through translated results are based on my interpretation and partiality. There might be realities that I cannot represent in my translation. Thus, I am aware that my translation takes part on the partiality, specific, situated knowledge produced in this research.

Why have I chosen to write it this way?

My research paper is written in a personal, narrative style. It includes stories and excerpts of dialogue between me, the waria, and neighbours. This style of writing allows me to reflect deeply on my positionality and the experience of these women. It helps me to avoid othering the people I spoke with, to limit the gaps between myself as researcher and the *waria* and neighbours. To avoid 'othering the other' and to instead see them as partners and *fellow human beings*.

I am aware of the tendencies and risks in my process of the writing, especially the gaps in the social power between me as researcher, the *waria* community and the neighbours living around the *ponpes*.

Writing against Othering serves to be thoughtful of social injustices around us—to understand them in our hearts and minds andto make a commitment to the *waria* community and the neighbourhood. Through this writing, I make use of three modes proposed by Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) that serve to resist Othering: 1) narrative, 2) dialog, 3) reflexivity. Undertaking narrative writing that includes dialogue and reflexivity as the compass of the research means to "display the goals and intentions of human actors; make individuals, cultures, societies, and historical epochs comprehensible as wholes; humanises time; allows us to contemplate the effects of our actions and to alter the directions of our lives" (Richardson 1990: 20). Through these modes, I wish to deliver the contexts of a story and point of views of my interlocutors, hence you, as the reader, receive intrapersonal reality and intersubjective context (Krumer-Nevo and Sidi 2012: 301).

Chapter 3 Understanding *Waria*

"You asked me what it means to be a waria? Here, let me tell you something. Being a waria means being myself. Being what I truly am. I feel great being a waria. Also, it enables me to spread a good vibe around me. I feel that I am freed." Kusuma, santriwaria in Kotagede[5]

I open this chapter with a statement from Kusuma, one of the outspoken women that advocates for the rights of waria. Her statement opens the deeper, personal discussion about how they define the word waria themselves. This chapter weaves together their stories and defines waria; the definition of their true self.

When I first met Rena, I did not recognise her as a *waria.* She wore a shirt, short pants, flip-flops and her hair is cut short. She wore no makeup and looked traditionally masculine. After some days in *ponpes*, I had the chance to speak with Rena personally. I asked her one fundamental question with regards to her identity. "How do you define what it means to be a *waria?* How do you define yourself?" Rena answered, "*Waria* is not only about appearance. It is beyond that. *Waria* means you were born male. You have a biologically male body. You might also appear as a man. However, you never, ever live your body and appearance. You really know that deep down, despite how you look, you are a woman."

Her answer resonates with what Ayu told me in another interview. She said, "waria is a woman soul born in a male body. I am waria. I have a woman soul; thus, I dress and wear makeup as woman. I do not like to wear men's trousers or clothes. I am not interested to play with something *boyish* like cars. That is my inner need and I am happy about that because I am woman inside."

Since she was 13 years old, Ayu found herself comfortable wearing women's dresses and began to identify as a woman. At first, she felt reluctant to identify herself as *waria.* "Because I feel that I am woman, not *waria.* I feel ashamed if people know that I am waria. I know I am waria, but I feel that I am woman." In our conversation Ayu separated *waria* and woman into two different categories, as *waria* is neither a 'third gender' nor 'transvestite'. It acknowledges her biologically male body, while performing her woman identity.

Apart from the appearance, sexual orientation, and gender performativity, the meaning of *waria* also touches upon acknowledgement and self-acceptance. Someone is *waria* when she admits that she is *waria.* If not, she is just a cross-dresser. Ayu is firm on how she expresses and defines *waria* as part of self-acceptance as she described:

> "*waria* is also about self-acceptance. Although you dress up as a woman, if you do not accept or acknowledge yourself as a *waria* then you are just a cross-dresser. Instead, if you accept and acknowledge yourself as waria although you dress up like a man, then you are a *waria."*

[5] Quoted from interview, July 4 2019.

Adding to her own statement, Ayu also emphasised how people mistake *waria* and label them as homosexuals. This, Ayu said, is such a huge mistake. "Waria and homosexuals are different. Because *warias* is about the soul, not merely sexual orientation." For Ayu, being *waria* should not be simplified to just her appearance or mislabelled as a transvestite. *Waria* rather means how she identifies herself as woman, while still maintaining her biological male body.

In the literature, *waria*s mention *jiwa perempuan* (woman soul) as the main reason of their attitudes and performativity. *Jiwa,* or soul, is considered as a constitutive source of *waria* subjectivity. *Jiwa perempuan* is significant not only to constitute the subject, but also their attitude and behaviours (Boellstroff 2004; Davies 2010: 122). In one of our conversations, Rena told me, "As a *waria,* I have *jiwa perempuan* (a woman soul) inside my body. That is why, although I wear jeans and shirt, people will still know that I am *waria* because my gestures and behaviours are feminine."

Historiography of Waria

The notion of *waria* has been thoroughly discussed by scholars (Boellstroff 2004; Blackwood 1998; Davies 2010). *Waria,* familiarly known as *banci* or *bencong,* is regarded as gender identity and expression 'outside' the dominant gender binary ideology. Although it is used to also refer to *waria,* the word *banci* is usually spoken derogatively; addressing men who have certain effeminate gestures and seem to not fit the typical-ideal dominant narrative of 'masculinity.' Tom Boellstroff (2004) argues that *waria* is construed as a "third gender," which is deemed as overly used and poorly defined term. Therefore, it is "male femininity" rather than "third gender" as *waria* "operates within the orbit of male gendering" (Boellstroff 2004: 161). The existence of *waria* is not a new phenomenon in Indonesian history, as they are visible in daily life of society, especially in beauty and wellness business, entertainment since early 1800s.

From the beginning, *warias* do not appear to be limited to any one ethnic group or locality. Therefore, I stress the importance that the understanding of *waria* should not be located in the same position with "ethnolocalised professional homosexual and transvestite subject position" or ETP (Boellstroff 2001). This term refers to queer selves that perform traditional-spiritual rituals. This confusion arose as Indonesia has a complex gender landscape with various gender identities since pre-colonial period that is regarded as non-normative gender (Davies 2010: 2).

ETPs are constructed throughout Indonesia and have its own local term. Boellstroff (2002) mentioned *kedi* (appears in Javanese and Balinese), *wandu* (in Javanese language, but also identified as local term in Sulawesi), *kawe-kawe* (commonly used in Makassar and Bugis community), and *calabai* (derived from Buginese community and also common in Kalimantan) as non-conforming gender identities in Indonesia. However, despite its different origins and contextual histories entailed in the construction of these local terms, *waria* is linked and used as a label to unify these unique local terms. For instance, as one Bugis waria explained in Boellstroff's paper the s/he is called a *calabai* by the family" based on their ethnicity. But if they were Makasarrese, s/he would be called *kawe-kawe* and it is the "same thing as *calabai*-- or *bencong, banci*" as they are only terms (2002: 162). Couple of the well-known Indonesian ETP communities are *bissu* in southern Sulawesi and *warok* in Ponorogo, East Java. In this community, there are established homosexual relationships between the *guru* and their

understudies known as *gemblak*. In his analysis, ETPs puts homosexuality or transgenderism in their identity as secondary to the specialised-traditional ritual. They were not 'born' or 'became' them, but rather they learn to achieve such apprenticeship. Therefore, ETP subject position should not be located and confused with *waria*.

While ETP existence has been acknowledged for hundreds of years, there is only little historical records of *warias* in Indonesia. The existence of *warias* were first traced in the early 1800s and do not appear as limited to certain ethnicity and races. In the earlier times, *waria*'s identity is associated with lowbrow entertainment, sex work and minor trading (Boellstroff 2004: 162). In the 1830s, *waria* involved in on-stage entertainment, such as the dances of "Bantji Batavia"—which literally means Batavia transvestite) and Surabaya traditional dance called *ludrug* (Boellstroff 2004: 163). This association still goes on today, with *being* linked with beauty and wellness businesses. In relation to *waria* subject position,s this identity can only be occupied by males as "all narratives of *waria* selfhood are driven by movement away from normative masculinity" (Boellstroff 2004: 163). *Warias* also believe they have had a soul of woman since birth. The term *waria* itself is a label dictated by the government during the New Order era, from 1978 (Boellstroff 2004: 162). Initially, this term originally appeared as *wadam* (wanita adam-female Adam) and was considered a nonderogatory term to refer to *waria* during the 1960s. Introduced by former activist mayor of Jakarta Ali Sadikin, *wadam* was linked to a greater social protection and visibility given to the *waria* at the time. However, the creation of *wadam* in the mid 1970s produced controversies. Some Muslim groups expressed disagreement and displeasure of the term *Wadam* as it incorporated the name of the prophet (Adam). Thus, the former Minister of Religion in the New Order era, Alamsyah, coined the term *waria* to change *wadam*. This term was agreed upon by former President Soeharto and officially published in the national newspaper *Kompas* throughout Indonesia (Budiman 1982: 17).

Figure 1 Ratri and waria sitting on *pendopo* inside *ponpes*

However, despite the long and complex history, the discourse and narrative evolved around *waria and* changed in the late 1950s and 1960s. As a newly independent nation ingraining its value from Islam, *warias* were discriminated against as they did not conform to the dominant gender binary and therefore became were pushed to the fringes of society. The mass violence

that happened around the birth of Soeharto's New Order in early 1960s, though it did not appear to be directed to *waria*, led to the virtual marginalization from the public and marketplace. As the result of this marginalisation, the dominant discourse of *waria* falls into three categories of economic class: those who own salons, those who work in salons, or those who perform sex work and lowbrow jobs in entertainment.

In understanding the identity of *waria*, queer theories will be suitable to use as a critical lens. Having queer theory as the framework is done in an effort to understand the dynamic of *waria's* gender and sexuality not as a static identity as well as their (body) performativity in the society, and how this identity evolves and reevolves in Kotagede. Queer theory also offers *queering* as a potent tool and "as a way of countering hegemonic textual reading and cultural authority, and as a critique of what Warner (1999) calls 'a regime of a normal'" (Taylor 2013). Queering seeks to challenge, deconstruct, problematise, and critique the hegemonic structure of power that has been deeply ingrained in the system. Furthermore, queer theory is arguing that identities are not fixed; instead, it is not stable deterministic regarding a person's sex, gender and sexuality. It critically examines how power works in legitimizing institutionalizing—and at the same time stigmatizing—particular forms and expressions of gender and sexuality.

The term queer is used as an umbrella by and for persons who identify as gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgender, intersex, and also referred as the alternative to LGBTI labels (Gieseking 2008: 737). It had been previously used as a derogatory word for homosexuality, but the term queer was taken back by activists during the 1980s and 1990s and became the "umbrella term" for all non-heteronormative individuals to refer to and claim (Goldman 1996; Jagose 1996). This theory destabilises and "denaturalises gender (masculine/feminine) and biological sex (male/female), questioning the assumed connectivity between sex and gender, or the legitimacy of presumed scientific classification" (Callis 2009: 215). Based on this understanding, I use queer theory as an entry point to understand the notion of *waria* and the evolving dynamics around the term. I contend that queer theory as a body of work is not restricted to pondering and interpreting gender and sexual subjectivities. Rather, "it is a philosophical commitment to contesting the logics of normativity" (Rooke 2016: 29) as it has been associated with "explorations of difference and the contestation of rigid categories and normalising discourses and practices, speaking instead of the fluidity of spaces and identities in the process of always 'becoming'" (Browne 2008, Haritaworn 2008 in Taylor 2016: 69).

The concept of queerness is useful in signalling disruption and can be employed as a "helpful analytical tool in the discussion of gender (Davies 2010: 14; Blackwood 2008; Boellstroff 2007a: 20-21). Thus, in this paper, using *queerness* and queer theory as a framework support the understanding of *waria* as a non-conforming entity, without putting it under Western labels or L G B T letter soup—which is strongly opposed by *waria* themselves—as queer is "not a concrete or bounded category" and "resists normalizing and privileging certain identity criteria and enforcing ridged identity categories" (Taylor 2013: 195). Queer becomes a resistant identity; a symbol of endeavours and tireless resistance towards the imbalance system of power.

Thus, in this paper, I seek to employ *queerness* in order to understand the interactions, relationships, symbols, and shared meanings amongst the *waria* and neighbours in Kotagede as it seeks to challenge the hegemonic structure and discourse. Given the fact that Kotagede is a neighbourhood that is deeply rooted in Islamic-Javanese values, I wish to make use of queer

theory, along with *queerness* as it concept, to understand how the *waria* in *ponpes* challenge and negotiate the normative Islamic system in the neighbourhood as well as resisting the religious discourse that seemingly discerns their identity as gender non-conforming subject. Furthermore, I find queer theory is useful to see how material inequality, such as class, and waria's intersectional identities play on the dynamics of waria life in *ponpes* itself and mitigate the dehumanization to ensue in the setting of Kotagede.

Chapter 4 How *Ponpes* Comes into Reality

"Ponpes gives us hope and home. There is no judgment at all here. This is where we can be closer to Allah and learn how to be a better person everyday," Rena, 2019.

This chapter tells the history of ponpes, from the beginning of its existence and how it continues to provide a safe space for waria to practice their religion today. This chapter provides the context of ponpes' emergence and how it destabilises the term 'pondok pesantren' as it is traditionally occupied with binary gender ideology.

The *ponpes* in Kotagede was created by Ratri. Her name is well-known in Indonesian media, though I have never met her in person before arriving to Yogyjakarta. After chatting with her for two months only through messenger, I finally met Ratri. It was very easy to recognise her. Her picture had been all over in Indonesian media after the forced closure carried out by a Muslim hard-line group in 2016. "I am very popular now," she said with laughter. *Ponpes,* that now has been fully under her provision, was initially founded by her late friend Maryani in 2008, after Jogjakarta was struck by 5,9SR earthquake. During the catastrophe, there were approximately 5,700 casualties and thousands injured including *waria.* As a form of condolence and solidarity, Maryani gathered *waria* communities to pray and hold charity events. Moreover, with the help from Ratri and respected late Kyai[6] Haji Hamrolie, Maryani managed to provide open space for *waria* to fulfil their spiritual needs and practice their religion.

"It is a beacon, a safe space for us. It is home."

Ponpes was initially run in Maryani's rented house, located in Notoyudan, Yogyakarta. In 2014, Maryani passed away, thus Ratri decided to move *Ponpes* from Notoyudan to her house in Kotagede. *Ponpes* managed to gather around 40 *waria* to pray and practice reciting Quran. They adopted traditional concept of Islamic boarding school and create curriculum with courses to hold from Monday to Thursday. Not only for studying religion, the *ponpes* also provides social activities on the weekends, for instance dancing courses, makeup classes, or *arisan* (community gathering) which also involves neighbours and non-waria. This *ponpes* furthermore functions as a safe haven for hundreds of *waria* to practice Islam, despite their perceived identities as 'deviant' and 'sinner' in the eye of patriarchal-heteronormative society. As a male body with feminine traits, *warias are* regarded as sinner for not conforming to the gender binary and deemed not 'eligible' to practice or even study Islam. Therefore, the existence of *ponpes* has brought a light and home for *waria,* a place where they are not seen as deviant aliens; rather they are recognised and respected as human-beings and members of the community.

[6] *Kyai* is a term for Javanese Islamic cleric on Islam.

Figure 2 Inside Ratri's *Joglo* house that functions as *ponpes*. At this terrace, *waria* usually gather and study Quran together. After the session is finished, this terrace functions as public room for any social occasion, such as *arisan,* gathering, or party.

Although initially formed to provide safe space for *waria*, Maryani and Ratri also opened this *ponpes* for non-waria Muslim who wants to join the courses and social activities. In the early days, late Kyai Haji Roemli helped teach the Quran recitation course and preached. "It has always been a place for every-single-one" Ratri said[7], no matter what your gender identity is. She always opens the *ponpes'* door to welcome anyone who wants to join. The existence of *ponpes* is supported by many parties, including religious leaders and the Yogyakarta Palace through an interfaith discussion under the topic of "Intolerance Movement and Overcoming Efforts." Furthermore, as stated in 1945 Constitution article 28A and 28I, Indonesian legal system ensures every right to live, right to freedom of mind, right to religion, and be recognized as human in the eye of law, and not to be persecuted on the basis of human rights," complemented with Article 29 paragraph 1 and 2 in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (DUHAM), strengthen the existence of *ponpes* and *waria* in Yogyakarta.

However, despite the good intentions to provide safe space for everyone to pray and fulfil their spiritual needs, Indonesian laws, and human rights declaration that ensure the freedom of *ponpes*, there has been persecution carried out by a local hardline Muslim group *Front Jihad Islam* (FJI)[8] in Yogyakarta.

During the persecution, FJI forced the closure of *ponpes* on the basis of hatred, accusation of Islam deception and blasphemy. "FJI comes from outside of Kotagede. Their bases are in another area. But they intimidated and threatened village officials by telling them that they

[7] Quoted from interview with Ratri, July 2019.

[8] Front Jihad Islam (FJI) is a local Muslim hard-line group founded in 2011. It seeks to uphold and establish Islamic canonic law *Sharia* in Indonesia, promotes *kāffah* totality in practicing Islam. To operate in Yogyakarta, FJI locates their bases at 43 Bibis Street, Padokan Lor Tirtomolo, Kasihan, and Bantul **(Makin 2017: 13).**

will come and raid again if *ponpes* still continues to operate," said Ratri while reminiscing the shocking confrontation. FJI regarded *waria* as a mistake in Islam discourse as it only acknowledges the binary gender ideology. The contestation of the existence of transvestite in Yogyakarta still went on. Three big Islamic councils in Indonesia; the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), Nahdatul Ulama, and Muhammadiyah have different takes but still similar points on the existence of *waria.* MUI points out two arguments based on the Quran: first, *waria* is however considered male as they have male bodies, and their identity should not be recognised. Second, any kind of behaviour 'regarded' as *waria* behavior is considered *haram* (illegal) and unlawful. These two points are contained in the *fatwa,* which is also supported by NU and Muhammadiyah, stating that "LGBT behavior and LGBT supporters were deviant and considered as a desecration of human honor" (Cakrawala 2018). Following this statement, NU pushed the government to take further concrete action in facilitating rehabilitation for *waria* (NU.or.id, 2016). In line with Nahdatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah also nods in agreement that transvestite or transgender behavior is contrary to *kodrat* (the nature of human being) and to the core value of Islam as religion. These arguments from three big Indonesian Muslim councils therefore stand as justification for hardline Muslim groups to force the closure and removal of *ponpes waria.* The persecution of the *ponpes* stopped its operation for four months until the situation became calmer. This not only resulted in the *ponpes'* dormancy, but the raid carried out by FJI raised insecurities among Kotagede residents about the existence of *ponpes.*

Courses were stopped, social and social activities were cancelled. However, this persecution did not stop Ratri from continuing to open *Ponpes* and protecting *waria* communities. Until today, *ponpes* has been acknowledged as a beacon for *waria* to find enlightenment upon their practice and study Islam. Ratri's bravery to protect *ponpes* and deal with Muslim hardliners resulted in her receiving the 2019 Front Line Defenders Award, making her brave actions and the existence of *ponpes* become more well-known.

Destabilizing Word 'Pesantren in the Dominant Narrative

In one of my visits, I was curious and asked Ratri why she chose the word *pesantren* to name her boarding school, as *pondok pesantren (ponpes)* traditionally emerged as a binary space—only for male students or female students. *Pesantren* also obliges student to stay in the boarding house, while *ponpes* waria does not do the same; it allows waria to come and go as much as they like, although there are currently three waria staying at *ponpes* with Ratri. For Ratri, *ponpes* is the only term closest to her aim and activities. She said,

> "Back in 2016, when FJI came and protested, they really focused on our name: *pondok pesantren khusus waria* (*ponpes* only for waria). They wanted us to change our name into 'Quran recital class' or 'Moslem waria community' whatever. But I said, it is up to me. I can name this community anything I want. And I choose '*pondok pesantren'* or '*ponpes'* as its meaning is the closest name to what we are doing here. We want to study and practice Islam. We have classes, library, praying room, also rooms for waria who want to stay here. It is similar with the so-called-traditional *ponpes.* Thus, I choose to use the word *ponpes* to name our community."

Ponpes is formed from two words: ***pondok*** and ***pesantren.*** Pesantren is one of the key institutions that plays important role in integrating Islamic values within society and states imposed in the laws and norm in Indonesia. Throughout its history, *pesantren* has played an

important role in the progression of Indonesian traditional Islam (Dhofier 1999; van Bruinessen 1995) and how *kyai* (a person assigned as the religious leader) holds the role as 'cultural broker' bridging the cultural values—in this case is Javanese—and Islamic values (Geertz 1960). Traditionally, *pesantren* is called *pondok* which means bamboo hut. In the past, *pesantren* usually used bamboos to build the classrooms and dormitories where the students live. While the word *pesantren* derives from the word *santri* (students), added with prefix pe and suffix an, thus creates the meaning: "the place of the *santri*" (Dhofier 1980: 4). However, *pesantren* logics are based on a biological determinism that only recognizes male or female genders. This concern does not provide space for people who transgress such norms like the *waria*. Waria is the Indonesian term for transvestite derived from the word *wanita* (female) and *pria* (male). Three of the biggest Indonesian Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, MUI (Indonesian Ulama Council), and Muhammadiyah classify *waria* as 'deviant' from the hegemonic, heteronormative sexuality discourse that led to the exclusion and lack attention from the government to provide 'secured' space for *waria* to fulfil their spiritual needs. Therefore, the existence of Pesantren *waria* Al-Fatah fills the dire gap for the practice and study of Indonesian Muslim as it deconstructs the traditional concept and perception of *pesantren* that can only be occupied by binary gender conforming students (boys and girls; man and woman).

This conversation makes me reflect on how *ponpes* destabilises the narrative in the society about "the exclusivity of 'conventional' pesantren in terms of identity and gender (that is boy, girl, man, woman)" (Safitri 2011: 96). It is nearly impossible for conventional pesantren to spare any space for non-conforming gender identity to study and reside. Therefore, the existence of *ponpes waria* can be seen as an attempt to destabilise the term *pesantren* itself; from an exclusive term for binary gender, to an inclusive term that includes santri waria as non-conforming sexual and gender identity.

This effort of destabilising the term *ponpes* is in accordance with *queering* as it challenges the dominant narrative of *pesantren* by destabilising the meaning of *pesantren. Waria,* through the existence of *ponpes,* challenges the hegemonic system of power that transpires within society, especially in the Islamic neighbourhood of Kotagede where they currently reside. *Waria* challenges the dominant narrative of *pesantren* that emerges from a binary ideology by using the term to identify their gender non-conforming subjectivity; an entity that is considered deviant and abnormal.

Chapter 5 Narrative of Kotagede

"It is one of the most conservative neighbourhoods in Yogyakarta." -Ratri.

This chapter describes the context of Kotagede, the neighbourhood where ponpes operates, and how it incorporates Islamic values in the norms upheld in the neighbourhood. Kotagede is deemed as one of the most conservative neighbourhoods in Yogyakarta. Here, I explore the dominant religion ideology in the body of Muhammadiyah, one of the biggest Islamic organisations in Indonesia and how it became integrated in Kotagede.

Kotagede: A Home Within a Home

When I first came to Kotagede, there was a feeling of friendliness and hominess in this area. Everyone smiled as they passed by one another though they were total strangers. Everyone knows everyone living in the neighbourhood. I discovered this certain level of neighbourliness when I once got lost in finding *ponpes* and someone approached me and asked, "Who are you looking for?"

"I am trying to find Ratri's house," I answered.

"Oh, just go to this direction," he said. After carefully making notes of his instruction on how to find *ponpes'* location, I said thank you and asked how he knows about Ratri's address although he lives a bit further from the area. "Everyone knows everyone here," he said. "It is a small *kampong."*

Kotagede adopted the *kampung,* a 'format' of neighbourhood that brings together a concept of 'village' and communities. The sense of community ties neighbours as they live and share their space together in the neighbourhood. As argued by Sullivan, "*Kampung* community is about neighbourship and there are strong pressures on *kampung* people to be good neighbours. Good neighbourship or 'neighbourliness' is quite precisely defined in *kampung* and powerful sanctions function to make community members behave in conformity with the conventions" (1992: p. 71). To achieve communal harmony amongst the neighbourhood, *kampung* holds strong on the word *rukun,* which is understood as "a situation in which people live together peacefully and based on compatibly" (Sullivan 1992: 106; Murray 1991).

The Integration of Muhammadiyah in Kotagede neighbourhood

Kotagede is one of the historical neighbourhoods situated in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Deeply rooted in Islamic values, this neighbourhood was initially built as the capital of Islamic Kingdom in Java, Mataram Kingdom. Therefore, since the very beginning of its emergence, Kotagede has had Islam in their 'blood' and system.

At the first day of my visit, I got a chance to roam around Gang Soka in Kotagede. There are remains of a palace, traditional mosques and houses. As part of the kingdom, the

architecture of Kotagede is comprised of a Palace, Square, Mosques and Markets that function as public areas where residents usually meet and interact. One of the remnants from this period is a traditional family mosque called Langgar Dhuwur. Langgar Dhuwur is a family prayer house built in the attic of traditional houses in Kotagede. It is constructed with wooden and walls and columns. Presently, only two langgar dhuwur remains in Kotagede and both are privately owned. The presence of the well-preserved Langgar Dhuwur in the area marks the strong Islamic values rooted in Kotagede society.

The coexistence of Islamic and Javanese traditions was deemed as crucial elements in shaping the society in socially, culturally, and economically (Mook 1958). The Islamic values that later play an important role in the Kotagede society comes from Muhammadiyah, one of the oldest Islamic organisations formed in 1912. Having Islamic values ingrained in the society, Kotagede preserves and follows Muhammadiyah core values in governing society. There are strong perceptions that Kotagede and Muhammadiyah are inseparable, in which Muhammadiyah became part of the local identity. The integration of Muhammadiyah in Kotagede also contributed to the advancement of the local economy. Many local silver entrepreneurs and traders in Kotagede were members of Muhammadiyah, and this membership elevated the production of silver goods until they reached a significant number, resulting in economic prosperity for the local Kotagede community (Sulistiyanto 2006: 256).

Figure 3 *Langgar Dhuwur* in Kotagede, one of the remainings from Mataram palace standing still in the neighbourhood.

In the early 1970s, Japanese scholar Mitsuo Nakamura studied the emergence and role of Muhammadiyah in Kotagede. In his study, he suggested that Islam and Javanese traditions are accepted as inseparable identity and way of living by the local people. Muhammadiyah was founded by Haji Ahmad Dahlan in early 20th century. It holds to "the mission of *amar ma'aruf nahi mungkar* (right relationship with fellow human being) and ensures that Islam (and Muhammadiyah) will bring *rahmatan lil'alamin* (peace in the world)" (Sulistyanto 2006: 258; Nakamura 1983: 48).

The integration of Muhammadiyah in Kotagede started in 1923, established by Haji Masyhudi, who had the mission to provide the needs of local people through religious and

social institutions (Nakamura 1983: 70). In Kotagede, neighbours know and support each other through cultural and religious activities such as *arisan, pengajian, paguyuban,* and *selamatan*[9]. Through these activities, local residents can show their willingness to accept and understand different beliefs and traditions. This neighbourhood upholds Javanese philosophy which upholds the value of tolerance and enables people with diverse beliefs and traditions to reside in Kotagede. As a Javanese society that is famous for being tolerant, Kotagede supports the basic Javanese principle of *tepa slira* which means to walk in someone else's shoes so as to comprehend their situation and the reasons behind their different beliefs and deeds (Hardjowirogo in Soehadha 2008:22). This principle speaks about empathy and understanding, and it is informed through their traditions and activities. Based on this context, the integration of Muhammadiyah as an Islamic organisation with Javanese core values, allowed for the balancing of each contrasting the norms and principles that govern the denizens.

I identified several aspects that contribute to the life of Kotagede: *kampung* as a format of the neighbourhood, *rukun* as the fundamental value to create harmony in the community, the coexistence of Javanese-Islamic culture and traditions in the history, the integration of Muhammadiyah, and *tepa slira,* a Javanese principle that symbolises empathy. The above-mentioned aspects are important and interconnected in the life of Kotagede, as well as how they play important roles in providing a space for *ponpes* and *waria* to exist in the neighbourhood. Thus, by considering these features, we can further understand what creates Kotagede as a more inclusive neighbourhood for *waria* to navigate and operate *ponpes* in the area.

[9] *Arisan* is a meeting where people can gather and discuss on local issues in their area. residents usually use this platform to update each other. *Pengajian* is a Koran recital class. *Paguyuban* is local community set up by residents. *Selametan* is a forum where residents usually celebrate and thank each other for important occasions, such as giving birth, birthday, marriage, or commemoration of late family members.

Chapter 6 "I am Waria, I am Moslem. I am human, too"

"We continue our activities because the right to practice your religion is one of the fundamental human rights. Fundamentalist group cannot stop our need to connect to God." -Ratri, 2019.

This part is dedicated to the stories I have heard and that were shared with me. Stories about life; how they live their life every day, and what they have witnessed and experienced as warias *living in the neighbourhood.*

Everyday life in Ponpes

I rarely saw the *ponpes* quiet or empty. You will see people gathering almost every day; sometimes it is just some *waria* paying a visit and having chitchats, and on another day the terrace would be full of *waria* and neighbours celebrating something—might be someone's birthday or death, or having discussion with (I)NGOs and local partners. Sometimes, Ratri just throws a partylike when she set up *syukuran*[10] to celebrate her award-winning achievement from a human right NGO. The *ponpes* was full of people; *waria,* neighbours, journalists and curious neighbours. The quietest day in *ponpes* was when everyone went to the beach for an outing. On the next day, Ratri already had another discussion with a local partner to discuss about *waria* and HIV/AIDS and the *ponpes* was full again.

Only Ratri, Ayu, Rena and Riri live in the *ponpe,* although Riri sometimes commutes and stays at her home nearby with her mother and brother. Other *waria,* like Lily and Deta, visit *ponpes* quite regularly depending on the activities that they have together. Lily, as she focuses on *waria* rights advocacy, comes to *ponpes* when there is a discussion happening between *ponpes,* NGOs, and local partners, while Deta visits *ponpes* when the community has any art activities and she helps with the dresses and make-ups.

Usually, *ponpes* gets crowded during the evenings. *Warias* gather to have dinner together, update each other on their lives, and just chitchat. Sometimes, youngsters in the neighbourhood will come to ponpes in the evenings just to sit and hang around with Ayu, Riri, Rena, and Ratri. That is usually how the weekdays go.

On the weekend, *waria* will gather in the late afternoon to have regular meetings before starting the Sunday school and recitation session. Usually 15-30 *waria* come and help the preparation, such as cooking dinner, tidying up the room and terrace, or buying snacks and beverages. Recitation session starts at 4 PM and the *Waria* gather in the terrace with their *sarong* or *mukena,* whichever is more comfortable, and get ready with their Quran in hand. After the session finishes, *waria* will hear a sermon from *Ustaz*[11] Arief, followed by discussion evolving around Islam and humanity. In the discussion, *waria* are free to throw questions, especially with regards to Quran passages and how it acknowledges non-conforming gender subjects.

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[10] A celebration for any special occasion, such as birthdays, marriages, or achievement.

[11] An honorific title for man and is used in various Islamic languages of the Muslim world. This title refers to any teacher or expert.

Through their everyday life and activities, the existence of *ponpes* thus supports the idea of 'everyday' resistance' (Scott 1985) against the hegemonic 'Islamic' discourse that does not conform *waria* identity into the dominant binary society. Everyday resistance brings up the notion of quiet, dispersed resistance; covers a different kind of resistance that is not massive, dramatic, 'formally' organised and explicit (Scott 1985). Instead, everyday resistance is seemingly invisible, and it comes in a form of common behaviour of subordinated group.

There are several dimensions within everyday resistance. One crucial element to be taken into account is spatialization of everyday resistance. Space, as conceptualized by Chin and Mittleman (1997), is not original. Claimed as one of the most conservative areas in Yogyakarta, Kotagede serves as a *site of resistance* (Chin and Mittleman 1997). In this context, sites are "social spaces; where social life is structured in a place-specific way…politically-legally, socio-culturally and socio-economically" (Vinthagen and Johanssen 2014: 9)

Kotagede upholds Islamic values as their main norms in ruling the society. There are public mosques and traditional *mushola* serve their function as a space to practice religion for Moslem residents. As it is designated as public, the mosque should be accessible to everyone. However, due to their sexuality and gender identity, *warias* are banned from entering the mosque unless they wear male *sarongs*. With the dominant binary narrative seeing them as deviant, *waria* are deprived from accessing the public mosque. Reflecting from Foucault, "space is fundamental in any exercise of power**"** (1980: 252). Space is political and ideological which implies that "certain social groups have a higher degree of access to or power over space, while others have more limited access to space." In the context of public mosque in Kotagede, there is an exercise of power where waria are put in subordinate positions; they cannoy not access the public space and are unable to practice their religion. Given the fact that their practices are restricted, *ponpes* emerges and performs as the site where the resistance starts, and it is crucial that resistance is "always situated somewhere and in a particular location" (Vinthagen and Johansson 2014: 9).

Through their activities, *waria* and *ponpes* resist the dominant gender binary ideology that has been deeply rooted in the society. Having provided a safe space to study Islam and practice *salat,*[12] *ponpes* resists the idea of a gender binary constructed in heteronormative society and deconstructed in a 'conventional' *ponpes* (Safitri 2011). Their everyday resistance comes in the form of regular activities, such as Quran recitation course every Sunday afternoon. Throughout the session, *ustad*[13] will guide the conversation and go into specific Quran verses that refer to gender and sexuality. In one of the discussions, *ustad* and *waria* talked about Islamic poet Abu Nuwas, his conception of paradise, and *wildan* (boys of paradise). In his preach, *ustad* mentioned how Abu Nawas was well-known of his verses about same-sex desire. Ratri, looking curious, innocently asked *ustad, "*if it was ever mentioned in Quran, why is same-sex desire condemned, then?" This discussion facilitated the space for *waria* and *ustad* to openly discuss critically and think about the discourse of sexuality and ask why queer identity is deemed 'abnormal' in the Islamic discourse. Therefore, this discussion emerges as a form of their everyday resistance while the heteronormative society acts as the superior and imposes

[12] Ritual prayer of Muslims practiced five times per day.
[13] Arabic word means 'male teacher'.

their values. *Warias* create their discursive space to openly speak about their sexuality through *pengajian.*

On a personal level, Ratri performs her everyday resistance through her daily appearance wearing a *hijab*[14]. Every single day, Ratri wears her *hijab* proudly. There is no day that passes where Ratri is seen without her hijab in public. Ratri's decision to wear her *hijab* is deemed as the everyday resistance; how body as "a space of power and everyday resistance." (Vinthagen and Johansson 2014: 9) "I am woman—socially declared," said Ratri. Within the dominant Islam discourse, the *hijab* symbolizes a decent, good Muslim woman. *Warias* in the eye have problematized and challenged the binary power of system in the society. And given the fact how *hijab* has been a symbol of good Muslim woman, Ratri's performativity of wearing *hijab* is a form of everyday resistance as it illustrates how Ratri as non-conforming gender subject wears *hjab,* as her identity and challenge the meaning.

"We can't agree with you, but we respect you as fellow human"

I still remember vividly the first day I arrived in Yogyakarta, Ratri invited me to help her with *bakti social,* a collaborative event at *ponpes* with *Persatuan Keluarga Berencana Indonesia* (PKBI; The Indonesian Plan Parenthood Association or IPPA) and The Asia Foundation. During the social event, Ratri and other *warias* helped each other to distribute packages of food and beverages to local residents. A representative came forward to the stage and delivered a thank you speech in regard to the event being held by the *warias.*

People sat on their plastic chairs. Some of them looked busy preparing the gifts and packages, while others casually walked from the back to the front of the stage. I was standing in the back when something suddenly caught my eye, the residents sat at the front or on their house's terrace, while *waria* sat in a different cluster with their fellow *waria.* I also encountered a similar situation when Ratri held a celebration for her award from Front Line Defender. Neighbours sitting in groups with other neighbours, while *warias* sat in another area of *ponpes,* also in a group. Though they know each other as they are neighbours, they seemed reluctant to sit together.

During the celebration, I chose to sit near an elder neighbour. She recognised me helping Ratri preparing the celebration. She came to me and ask, "Do you know if *ponpes* has the permit to operate here? Because it is important to mitigate any forced closure being carried out again by the hard-line group if they know that *ponpes* still operates here."

During my stay at *ponpes,* I interacted with some neighbours living nearby. There were three neighbours I had close interactions with: Ufi, Sri, and Nono. Three of them have been living in Kotagede for years and have seen its transformation from a quiet neighbourhood to a vibrant area where curious tourists visit. They have witnessed *ponpe's* move to Ratri's home in 2014, the protest and forced closure carried out by FJI in 2016, and how it regained its agency and became active again.

[14] A head cover worn in public by some Muslim women. It also functions as religious code in Islam.

Figure 4 *waria* and neighbours during *bakti sosial. Residents and waria gather in the event and receive basic need support, such as livestock, beverages, and clothes.*

Nono lives 300 meters from *ponpes.* In 2016, when the Moslem hard-line group protested and forced the closure of *ponpes,* Nono helped take role as *kampung* security. "I remember at that moment when FJI came and boycotted *ponpes;* I was there and I took the role of security guard during the raid," Nono said to me in one late afternoon. "They were told to shut down to avoid another raid because women should be women and men should be men. There is no such thing as 'in between' like *waria.* However, they decided to continue despite our reminders to keep it on the down low. Well, let Ratri be the one who takes any responsibility."

Nono's response illustrates how he aims to position himself as a good neighbor by protecting members of his community from an aggressive raid, but at the same time, the *waria* are still positioned as the Other. In this setting, they might seem to integrate, for instance through *gotong-royong* response they made during the raid, to gather and protect each other, but the othering still occurred in a sense that Nono sees *waria* as the community that falls outside of the dominant heteronormative gender category.

Similar impressions were also shown when I asked Ufi, the waroeng owner, whether he knows and interacts with the *waria* living or visits *ponpes* and joins in on the *pengajian* every Sunday. He answered, "*I often see them walking around my* waroeng. *I know some of them, I have their WhatsApp. Sometimes they buy instant noodles here. But that is all. I never come and join their events or Sunday school. We have our own in the mosque nearby."* A similar statement was also made by Sri, a neighbour whose house is right beside *ponpes.* She has known Ratri since the 1980s. Sri and Ratri have a close relationship as they always help each other when there are ceremonies or parties in their house. However, Sri never joins *pengajian* with *waria.* She said, "*But we can't agree with them it is just how they are."*

This 'sameness-otherness' situation continues until the celebration of Eid al-Adha in mid-August. I was sitting with Ratri and asked, "Are we going to have a celebration for Eid al-Adha with the neighbours?" and Ratri answered, "We are going to have our own celebration at *ponpes."* Usually Eid al-Adha is celebrated by sacrificing a goat, which is called the *qurbani*

and is distributed to family, friends, and the poor. This year, *ponpes* sacrificed three goats for Eid al-Adha. Two of them were donations from Queen Ratu Hemas and Nahdlatul Ulama, the traditional Sunni Islam organisations in Indonesia. "After that, we will distribute the meat to neighbours and fellow *waria,"* Ratri added.

However, despite being othered, Sri never sees *waria* as inhumane. Though she does not agree, Sri respects the *waria* and sees them as her fellow human being. "I do not agree but we respect them as humans—as God's fellow creations*."*

This interaction and perception is well-discussed within the concept of neighbourliness, that is understood as the act of friendliness and openness towards people living in the neighbourhood in relation to politics of living together. The idea of politics of living together is to "investigate differences and to bring into relief the shifting intersections of dominant imagination of class, ethnicity or 'race', and religion or the secular," (Vollebergh 2016b: 18). Politics of living together aims to understand what happens *"in between* denizens-perception, translations, practices and feelings-when these mutual everyday engagements have become the object of a political project." (Ibid: 19) In the politics of living together, discourse of self/othering is also scrutinized. Vollebergh, in her book "Strange Neighbour: Politic of Living", within the context of neighbourhoods in Belgium, highlights the process of identification of self/(cultural) other. Othering has become "a new construction of exclusion" in late 20th century Western Europe (Stolcke 1995:4).

The notion of politics of living together problematises two kind of relationships: "their perception of one another as 'strangers' in the context of neighbourhood public space) and their interaction as 'neighbour' "(Vollebergh 2016b: 39). This notion brings attentions to a figure of The Neighbour that relates to two fundamental concepts: the Self and the 'strange' Other. In the construction of Self/Other, there has been a binary logic that Self, as the 'us=good=correct', and the Other as 'them=bad=wrong'.

In understanding the 'limited' neighbourliness, the sameness and otherness, and the Othering in some respects occurring between *waria* and neighbours, I follow the logic from Anick Vollebergh:

> "The figure of the Neighbour is characterised by the fact that, as a near Other, s/he creates two opposed movements and structures of feeling simultaneously. The Neighbour's embodied Otherness constitutes an ethical call for a complete rapprochement dissolving the boundary between Self and Other. On the other hand, his/her near Otherness also forms a constantly irritating presence that haunts the apparent similarity and closeness and therewith the possibility of truly knowing any Other. Thus, the neighbourly relation in its abstract form is structured upon a paradox, its fundamental Otherness being both opening and limiting, evoking both desire and frustration." (Vollebergh 2016: 137)

In the religious discourse, gender nonconforming subject is imagined as the strange—the Other to the religion. There is strangeness in the dominant gaze towards the Other. By the virtue of the gender Otherness, the *waria,* is perceived as the alienating threat that might erode their belief and Islamic values integrated in society. *Waria* is imagined as the strange gendered 'Other' as it does not conform to the dominant gender discourse in their religion.

In this setting, there is Othering process occurring towards *waria* community in *ponpes*. In the interview excerpts with Nono, Ufi, and Sri, all three of them perceive *waria* in *ponpes* as their Other (gender) neighbours. However, despite the Otherness in the relationships and interactions, *ponpes* still operates actively in Kotagede. In contrast to the situation in the broader society where waria is dehumanised in many aspects, *waria* and neighbours see each other respectfully as fellow human being.

"What makes it work here?"

Having heard stories from neighbours and waria about the feeling of sameness and otherness in their interaction, I find there are several aspects at play in the mitigation of othering and the relationships between *waria* and neighbours, such as nativeness, strong networks with local partners and NGO, class-education, and 'the invisible' support from The Yogyakarta Sultanate. The *ponpes* seems to navigate their relationships with neighbours, strengthen their position in the neighbourhood, and are hence are able to operate in this setting.

*"*She is a local. A *pribumi":* Nativeness in Kotagede

In the middle of our conversation, I asked Ratri, "There was once an attempt to shut *ponpes* down. Some residents are aware of this, and so are you. There were also disagreements arose when you decided to continue *ponpes* and you kept on going anyway. What makes you stay here? What enables ponpes to operate here?" She nodded and simply said, "because I was born and raised here. This is my house. My home."

Ratri was born and raised in Kotagede. The neighbours know her as a 'pribumi', a term to address a local resident. She was born in a middle-upper class society; her late father was a prominent silver-crafting businessman. In this setting, Ratri used to be a little child who discovered the 'woman' soul inside her 'male' body. Since she was in junior high school, Ratri learned how to do make-up and even wore make-up to school. For Ratri, Kotagede has always been her forever 'motherland'; a place where she grows and explores herself. Ratri said since the beginning of her story of being a *waria,* her neighbours know and acknowledge her identity. She said no one has a problem with her putting on makeup, dressing up as woman, and being a *waria.* "I've been putting on makeup since I was in the 7th grade. I wore dress and danced as a woman. In the 9th grade I represented my neighbourhood to compete in a dangdut[15] competition, also wearing a woman's dress. I have been this way since I was a kid and no one saw it as a problem at that time," she explained.

In regard to her identity as *waria,* she is accepted in the neighbourhood because the neighbours know she was born and raised there. "I am the only waria in Kotagede, and everyone here knows me. They know who I am. They accept me here, because I was born and raised here."

The same response and 'reason of acceptance' also came from the neighbours living around *ponpes.* Ufi, the first neighbour I talked to has been living in Kotagede since the 1980s, owning

[15] Dangdut is Indonesian music genre, mixture of Malayan and Arabic music. This genre is sometimes associated with middle-lower class.

the *waroeng*[16] 50 meters away from *ponpes.* The presence of Ratri as a local has made *warias a* familiar presence in Kotagede. Ufi said, he often sees waria walking around the neighbourhood, especially during weekends when *ponpes* open Sunday school and Quran recitation courses. I first asked him what makes *ponpes* keep existing in their area even after the forced closure in 2016. He answered, "Because Ratri is a local. She's is pribumi. She's been here before she became a waria and that is (ponpes) also her house."

A similar answer was also given by Nono, Ratri's childhood friend. He's known Ratri since she was in junior high school and they have been friends ever since. When FJI came to carry out the forced closure of *ponpes,* Nono took position as security guard and helped hold back the raging FJI mass. For him, the presence of *ponpes* does not bother neighbours. They know it exists in their area. However, Nono said, "Ratri lives here. She is a local and her house is here,"

Ratri's identity as a *pribumi,* born and raised in Kotagede neighbourhood, therefore, helps preserve the existence of *ponpes* in Kotagede. Although Ratri as waria is seen as the 'Other' in the neighbourhood, her *pribumi* identity that indicates her nativeness helps mitigate and resist dehumanisation that occurred in the public realm outside Kotagede. While Ratri is seen as the 'gender other', her nativeness as Kotagede resident reverse her identity into the 'Self', fellow native born and raised in the same area. Nevertheless, not only her life history of being born and raise in Kotagede, Ratri's nativeness is also extended to her ownership of the house that now she uses for *ponpes.* Neighbours allow Ratri and other *waria* to access and operate the *ponpes,* given the fact that *ponpes* is her house; it belongs to her.

Through the notion of politics of living together, it unravels how the neighbours see and live together with the *waria* as the other. In the above interview excerpts from Nono and Ufi, both discuss how they see *waria* as the gender categorical Other that conflicts with their belief as the Self. However, the Other identity is negotiated through Ratri's status as native. Her nativeness becomes a crucial element in dissolving the Otherness in her relationship and interactions.

Stories of *Sarong* and *Hijab*[17]

On the weekends during my days in Kotagede, I got a chance to join their Sunday school at *ponpes. Warias* came and gathered on the front porch. The class usually lasted until 6PM and was followed by Maghrib prayer, a moment when they perform *salat* together. It is an obligation to perform salat. Moslem woman are required to wear *mukena* and Moslem men are required to wear the *sarong.* In *ponpes, waria* have the option to choose whether they are more comfortable to wear *mukena* or *sarong.* Before *salat* started, I asked Nana what she usually wears. "I usually wear a *sarong as* it feels more comfortable to me. I was born as a male, so when I pray, I should wear something that matches the body I was born in because it is about Allah and religion. I should not take it for granted or not be serious about it," she said.

[16] Indonesian word for small food stall.
[17] This chapter is developed based on my previous essay, "*Sexuality of Indonesian Transvestite: Waria",* submitted for Gender and Sexuality as 'Lens' to Engage with Development Policy and Practice course on July 14 2019.

In contrast, Ratri and Ayu choose to wear mukena while doing *salat*. Ratri said, "I feel more comfortable wearing a *mukena* because I am a woman and Islam obligates women to wear a *hijab*. Thus, I wear it and it suits me well,"

Through this conversation, I began to reflect on Saba Mahmood's politics of piety. This concept was introduced in her study of the women's piety movement in Egypt. In her book *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and The Feminist Subject* (2005), Mahmood sees how the movement has challenged the established power structure and also questions the concept of freedom. Women in Egypt started the movement by entering mosque and doing *da'wa* amongst women. The movement was done also by entering and occupying the mosque that is deemed as a space for men based on the interpretation of the text. It is a form of women's submission to religious disciplinary standards in order to construct a desirable Muslim piety. In the eye of Westerners, this form of submission is not seen as liberating. However, Mahmood suggests that this submission to the normative system is a form of women's agency. The agency is not directly concerned with discovering its genuine wants or emotion, but rather with seeking perfection both mentally and emotionally in its subjectivity with respect to the pious selves that the will of God desires. Through this case, the notion of freedom should be considered that "in a context where the distinction between the subject's own desires and socially prescribed performances cannot be easily presumed, and where submission to certain forms of (external) authority is a condition of achieving the subjects' potentiality" (Mahmood 2001: 31). Furthermore, Mahmood, also offers the understanding of agency "not as synonym of resistance to relation of domination, but as capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create." (2001: 203)

In a few words, politics of piety vis-à-vis agency, as argued by Saba Mahmood, speaks to how the act of submitting to the authority and normative system practiced by subordinate groups is an exercise of their agency. Instead of being seen as merely submissive to the system, this form of piety challenges the normative system by choosing to submit themselves to it. Therefore, the ability to choose, as well as consciously submit themselves to the dominant system, reconstruct, and redefine the pious self, is a performance of agency.

Through the lens of politics of piety, I identify how the construction of piety performed by *waria* illustrate their submission to the authoritative, dominant narrative of pious self; Muslim woman should wear hijab and *mukena,* while Muslim man don the *sarong* during *salat. Waria* seemingly submit themselves to the normative system that is deemed binary as it only acknowledges the 'decent Islamic dress code' for women and men discerning the gender non-conforming subject. Nevertheless, within *ponpes* as the affirmative space, *waria* are able to choose to don the *sarong* or wear the *mukena* for *salat*—whichever makes them most comfortable. This case illustrates how the construction of pious self as the mode of agency and the attempt to reconstruct their body and mind through "a discursive tradition that regards subordination to a transcendent will (and thus, in many instances, to the male authority) as its coveted goal." (Mahmood 2005: 2-3) By submitting to the normative religious standard and performing the pious self that conforms the Islamic dominant narrative, *waria* claim agency while resisting the existing social and religious norms that consider them as odd, deviant, and subordinate.

Furthermore, Ratris' decision to wear the *hijab* points out that piety does not only serve her agentive actions; her piety also mitigates the dehumanisation and othering that might also

occur. In Indonesia, the sarong and mukena are essential elements for Indonesian Muslims, as it does not only express pious Moslem themselves, but also how it represents 'good Indonesian Moslem identity. For Moslem women, wearing a *hijab* symbolises the life and respected appearance of a good Moslem. This performance of piety is best illustrated through a conversation excerpt with Ratri as follows, "It is easier for me to talk with people outside *ponpes* when I wear a *hijab*. They respect me more." With respect to the dominant narrative that a good Muslim woman should wear *hijab*, Ratri chooses to submit herself into this narrative and be a pious Moslem waria. Through her submission, she performs her piety as an endeavour that helps her mitigate the dehumanisation to occur in this setting.

"As a minority striving for our rights, we cannot walk alone"

"You know, what strengthens our position and keeps us existing here? Strong networks," said Ratri to me on my last day staying in the *ponpes*. We just finished welcoming a guest from VESTA, a local organisation that focuses on HIV/AIDS issues in Yogyakarta.

The existence of *ponpes* comes with support of several local, national, and international NGOs. Ratri, with her organising skills, managed to build a strong and wide network that ensures the prolonged existence of *ponpes* in Kotagede. Currently, the closest organisation that supports *ponpes* is *Persatuan Keluarga Berencana Indonesia* (PKBI; The Indonesian Plan Parenthood Association or IPPA) branch Yogyakarta. Having established strong relations and partnerships since the 1980s, Ratri and PKBI[18] created collaborative projects and social events to support *waria* communities in Yogyakarta. This strong bond further bolsters *ponpes* to come into existence by sharing knowledge, network, capacity building trainings, facilities, and administrative support. Meanwhile PKBI provides local support, while Ratri builds networks with The National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*), *Arus Pelangi*, GWL-INA (Gay, *Waria,* Lesbian Indonesia), and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* National Alliance (ANBTI). This web of networks has become stronger as *ponpes* is supported by international NGOs, such as The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights (RFSL), ASEAN SOGI caucus, and the International Trans Fund (ITF).

For financial matters, *ponpes* is supported by volunteers. "We also openly accept donations from anyone who wants to provide support, media coverage, support for academic papers, we partner with the Institute of International Studies (IIS), the Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies (CRCS) Gadjah Mada University Yogyakarta (UGM), and the Alliance of Independent Journalists supports us for media coverage," Ratri continued.

[18] PKBI was first established on December 23 1957 that focuses on the fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health and right. Currently, PKBI operates in 27 chapters, 214 branches and 96 outlets. (https://pkbi.or.id/information-about-our-organization/)

Figure 5 *waria* and a local partner during discussion.

These networks are built and strengthened by Ratri who initiated *ponpes*. Compared to other *waria,* Ratri comes from a different background. There are privileges that Ratri has: acceptance from her family, coming from a upper-middle class family (having silver family business), well-educated with prominent education as she possesses bachelor's degree from one of the top universities in Indonesia. This background enables her to operate *ponpes* and build networks with strong local and international NGOs. In addition to this, Ratri has the ability to partner with PKBI to hold social events that engage neighbours, such as *bakti sosial,* free medical check-ups, and free food packages distributed to residents. This event creates a certain feeling of neighbourliness and is the *waria* community's attempt to integrate within the community and undermine the stereotypes that *waria* are troublesome. Instead they highlight how the *waria* community brings virtue and benefits to society. Through social events with PKBI, Ratri engages with neighbours also as a form of good neighbourliness as she said, "Neighbours know PKBI and how they work with *ponpes* very well. PKBI has the closest engagement with neighbours here because they can receive free medical check-up, food stocks, and sometimes PKBI opens a bazaar. That is how they have come to know PKBI and *ponpes* because they receive benefits from us and PKBI."

The existence of *ponpes* is also strengthened by support from Lily, a *waria* that works to advocate human rights, including *waria* communities. Lily is a *waria* from Bone, South Sulawesi. She is educated, has a prominent background, and has served as legislative member in Sulawesi. This strong education and legal background are now being used to ensure *ponpes'* existence through the *VESTA* organisation in Yogyakarta. Her position as a human rights advocate helped Ratri to ensure *ponpes* keeps functioning. In 2016, when the forced closure

happened, Lily took thre position as the advocate cum lawyer. She opened dialogue with Ratu Hemas, queen consort of the Kingdom of Yogyakarta with regards to the discrimination that *waria* community was facing.

In this setting, Ratri and Lily possess more privilege than when compared to their fellow *waria* who were unable to continue their education due to discrimination and rejection by their family and society. Their privileged positions is also recognized and acknowledged by their fellow *waria*. Ratri and Lily have a certain position within the society, where they can engage and connect with individuals within the mainstream society with greater ease than *warias with lower levels of education*.

Tepa Slira: 'try to walk a mile in someone else's shoes, so you understand'

One of the fundamental features that plays a vital role in mitigating the dehumanisation that occurs towards *waria* is the Javanese basic principle of *tepa slira;* a sense of understanding and solidarity.

During one of the conversations with Ufi and Sri, I asked how they reflect on *warias* as neighbours and how this identity contradicts with their beliefs. In his answer Ufi said, "We are aware of our differences, but that is fine. We are all the same, fellow human beings.". A similar response also came from Sri that said, "we accept them for who they are. It is their fate from God and who are we to judge? We never know how it feels to be like them."

This conversation between me, Ufi and Sri about understanding and empathy exemplifys the residents' attempt to define and negotiate what it comprises the ideals of living together and what 'good' neighbourliness means. Their attempts in negotiating the ideal living situation evolves from of Javanese principle *tepa slira.* This principle is applied to show compassion and achieve harmony in society. As a neighbourhood that is strongly rooted in Javanese milieu, Kotagede applies this principle in their everyday life, and by accepting the existence of *ponpes* in the middle of their neighbourhood illustrates the best application of *tepa slira* amongst its residents.

Another case that elucidates the importance of *tepa slira* is the interfaith dialogue held by the Palace of Yogyakarta. The dialogue involved Ratu Hemas, Ratri, Lily and some *waria* on behalf of *ponpes* which occurred in 2016 after the forced closure of *ponpes*. This dialogue provided a space for the *waria* community and Yogyakarta Sultanate to exchange ideas and opinions regarding increasing tolerance in Yogyakarta, and how to create an inclusive region for every resident. As a Javanese monarchy in Yogyakarta that symbolises the Javanese culture and performs as the highest authority, the Yogyakarta Sultanate was deemed responsible to uphold the Javanese norms of tolerance and respect.

As she holds the position as the Queen that represents Yogyakarta Sultanate, *Ratu*[19] Hemas also holds the responsibility to ensure tolerance within society. Therefore, Ratu Hemas is an important key to integrating and ensuring the acceptance of *waria* in Yogyakarta. The protection from Ratu Hemas also comes under the form of the organisation *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*[20] National Alliance (ANBTI). Through this organisation, Ratu Hemas provided the space and shelter for victims of intolerance, including *ponpes*. "ANBTI is sheltered by Ratu Hemas. Thus, ANBTI and LBH are *ponpes'* closest partners in terms of security," said Ratri.

[19] Indonesian term for queen. Ratu Hemas, translated in English as Queen Hemas, is the wife of Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, the Sultan of historic Yogyakarta Sultanate. Sultan, roughly translated as King, holds political and spiritual position in Yogyakarta.

[20] Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is the official national motto of Indonesia. This phrase is derived from Old Javanese, translated as Unity in Diversity.

Chapter 7 "Nevertheless, we are hopeful to be here"

At the end of my stay in *ponpes,* I said bye to Ratri and Ayu and asked for their prayer so I can succeed in delivering their stories in my writing. Ratri smiled, and she said, "Keep us in your heart when you are writing. Please amplify our stories; voices of a lesser entity."

As a non-conforming gender identity, *warias* have been othered and dehumanised in many settings and situations. In most cases, *warias* have been stripped from their rights and have had their access to needs and services restricted. *Warias* have been seen as the gender categorical Other, being seen through the dominant Self gaze by the state and religion as deviant and as an alien. However, regardless of the dehumanisation and othering occurring towards them in the broader society, they feel accepted and are able to navigate their relationships with their neighbours in Kotagede. The neighbourhood has opened its arms wide for the existence of *ponpes,* despite the conflicting gender discourse between the two groups. The dehumanisation towards *waria* in the broader society rarely ever happens in Kotagede, the place where they belong now.

Figure 6 *Waria* and two elderly neighbours.

Waria's intersectional position in society plays a pivotal role in navigating their relationships with neighbours and in mitigating the dehumanisation as well. Ratri and Lily's education background, for instance, enable both to gain knowledge in networking and organisational skills that benefit *ponpes* to build a strong network supported by local partners, international NGOs, and the Yogyakarta Sultanate. These strong networks, as shown in the previous chapter, ensure the continuation of *ponpes'* existence in the neighbourhood. Moreover, Ratri's nativeness as a resident of Kotagede, born and raised in the area, helps mitigates the dehumanisation towards *waria* and *ponpes* as she owns the house and takes a leading position. Her nativeness seems to bridge the gap between the neighbours as the Self and *waria* as the gender Other. Also, through the lens of Saba Mahmood's concept of piety, *waria's* pious self-performance helps them integrate in Kotagede as well as mitigate the dehumanisation that can

happen in society. Wearing a *hijab* for instance helps Ratri gain respect from her neighbours, while donning a sarong during prayer helps some *waria* to be accepted in the public as it seemingly matches their male bodies.

Other than that, the Javanese principle ingrained in the neighbourhood also balances the binary gender discourse propagated in Islam as their dominant belief. The principle of *tepa slira* ensures compassion and solidarity in society and seems to have mitigated the dehumanisation towards *ponpes* and the *waria* community in this setting. Though otherisation and challenges are still present through acttions, time, and space vis-à-vis (dominant) Islamic (religion) discourse, neighbours respect the *warias* to fulfil their needs in connecting with God. Ratri, Lily, Ayu, Rena, and Deta may differ from Ufi, Sri, and Nono, but they see each other as neighbours. They see each other as humans; as fellow human-beings.

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I ended my journey after a month of staying in *ponpes*. I prepared my bag and got ready to hop on the train to take me back to Jakarta.

There are many things I learned on this journey. I remember the last things Ratri said to me before I left, "Despite the discrimination and hardships we face, we are hopeful to be here. We fight every day. We will struggle until we achieve a just society. We will never stop. Never." This has not left me as it continues to echoe in my mind. Our struggle will continue.

We never stop. Will never and will never be.

A luta continua.

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