ASEAN QUEER IMAGININGS

ASEAN SOGIE CAUCUS

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Collection Of Writings By LGBTIQ Thinkers

ASEAN SOGIE CAUCUS
2021

ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC) is a network of human rights activists from Southeast Asia that dynamically engages diverse actors to collectively advocate for the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer people, and gender-diverse persons in Southeast Asia. Its mission is to empower, develop capacities, and expand spaces for leadership of LGBTIQ and gender-diverse persons in defending their human rights.

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Introductory Message

By RYAN V. SILVERIO

I am excited to present to you the very first edition of ASEAN Queer Imaginings, a collection of short, insightful, and hopefully provocative opinion pieces. Beyond being a mere published material, this initiative seeks to widen spaces for activists to develop ideas, to reflect on praxis, and to weave new theories that may potentially inspire LGBTQIA (which includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other gender diverse persons) activism in Southeast Asia.

ASEAN SOGIE Caucus is privileged to have nine (9) queer activists from Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam articulating their imaginations towards an inclusive ASEAN region. All of them have been invited to reflect on and write about their critical observations and insights gleaned from direct experiences at the national or regional levels. Apart from being contributors, the writers appraised each other's works, thereby creating a space for peer review and learning.

Various forces alienate us, and push us away from our rightful place within ASEAN. Our identities and experiences, mostly criminalized using colonial laws, are flagged as dangerous imports that are non-existent from governments' heterosexist, cis-gendered, and usually patriarchal view of history, culture, or traditions. There are allegations that our legal claims for human rights merely parrot a Western ideological agenda that do not conform with ASEAN's domestic particularities. Our spaces for activism continue to be threatened with violence by conservative groups organized under the banner of religion.

In this edition, we try to confront a big question: how can we create inclusive spaces within ASEAN where LGBTIQ persons can truthfully feel they belong to? In answering such a question, the featured essays navigate through the diverse experiences of activism in the region. The essays reflect how LGBTIQ activists engage across multiple fronts: advocating for governments' full respect of universal human rights, especially the principle of non-discrimination; utilizing the power of creative expression and art as having a strategic role to harness the diverse souls that fire up our collective struggles, and cultivating leadership that is anchored on transformative principles yet coupled with a commitment to reflexivity.

I do hope you find this material useful in your own queer activism journey. The book may not be able to provide specific directions yet. At the very least, I hope the pieces here can prompt the needed conversations and inspire you to write future essays about our collective praxis.

Ryan V. Silverio
Regional Coordinator
ASEAN SOGIE Caucus

Foreword

By YUYUN WAHYUNINGRUM

Articulating the identity of ASEAN has been high on the agenda of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, especially in translating the idea of "One Vision, One Identity, One Community." A number of dialogues have been conducted among sectoral bodies in ASEAN on the meaning of the identity of being ASEAN. One of the important outcome documents of the 37th ASEAN Summit in November 2020 was about the "Narrative of ASEAN Identity."

The purpose of the offered narrative, as the document suggests, is to remind the ASEAN Member States of who we are, where we come from, and where we are heading, both as an organization as well as a community. It involves a process of the social construct that is shaped by a balanced combination of "Constructed Values" and "Inherited Values." The former emphasizes the values of a group of people or nations who find themselves in association with, and who have intentions to develop an allegiance with certain mindsets directed towards achieving a specific community objective. On the other hand, the latter suggests values that the people of Southeast Asia region ascribe to, which have been passed on for generations, through the natural process of human interaction that develops into various types of communities with much similarities.

As a social construct, ASEAN identity will continue to shape and be re-shaped by different actors, context and ideas. ASEAN, as a regionalism project, has transformed along with its development in the last more than 50 years. Today, ASEAN is not only outward looking as it takes an active role as part of the dynamic global community, it also embraces international law and rules of trade, democracy, freedom, human rights, and unity in diversity, while maintaining the principle of non-interference, sovereignty, and consultation/dialogue.

Nevertheless, the Narrative of ASEAN Identity forgets the most important ingredient in the construction of the ASEAN Identity, one without which, ASEAN will be a meaningless Community, that is, the people's voices and participation. ASEAN identity should be what people believe in and feel about ASEAN. Also, it may be misleading to perceive that identity is static, as it always evolves and stretches. The current development of technology contributes to the vast change of identity of individuals, groups of people, and nations. Nevertheless, one thing is clearer: marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion in all forms do not make ASEAN a people-oriented community. Rather, this people-centered community can be achieved through people engagement, good governance, and social

equity.

One of the purposes of the Narrative of ASEAN Identity is for the member states to use it as a tool to better inform the people about ASEAN. There must be other ways to portray ASEAN to the general public in order to generate the "we feeling" of ASEAN, such as ensuring (a) the respect, protection, and fulfillment of human rights of the minorities, (b) equitable access to opportunities for the people of ASEAN, (c) basic social protection and health services for marginalized and vulnerable people in ASEAN, (d) fair and good governance, and (e) meaningful engagement with all people in ASEAN.

In most places in the ASEAN region, LGBTQIA groups were marginalized, discriminated, and excluded from the society. Some experience persecution and criminalization for being who they are. Some have to deal with hate speech and blames. During the COVID-19 situation, LGBTQIA people, especially those who live with compromised immune systems such as people with HIV/AIDS, have become more vulnerable. Moreover, during the web-consultations I organized in October and November 2020, I was informed that on top of facing stigma and discrimination while seeking health services, LGBTQIA people in Southeast Asia also had their health treatment interrupted and deprioritized during pandemic.

It is exactly why this book is important as an expression of resistance to the narrative that is being imposed by the politics and interests of the member states --- the narrative that dictates how we should feel ASEAN in order to be identified as part of ASEAN. The voices in this book reject any efforts that may lead to 'othering others' in shaping the ASEAN Identity. The book seems to be in communication with the Narrative of ASEAN Identity by challenging the meaning of its 'imaginary community' of Southeast Asia and asks ASEAN to extend, enlarge, and enrich its imagined community space to the point where everyone is included.

Different from what the Narrative of ASEAN Identity is, this book explores the idea of connectedness, social relations, and the core common good such as human rights, solidarity, civic participation, and human dignity. Trusting people's will, impartial law enforcement, democracy, the acceptance to diversity, and resilient social network among the population are things that make people connected with the idea of the community. Indeed, we need more books like this to be published in the near future. In my capacity as Representative of Indonesia to the ASEAN

Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), I would like to congratulate ASEAN SOGIE Caucus for this awesome initiative.

When AICHR was established 11 years ago, there was an expectation that AICHR will not only perform the promotion and protection of human rights in the region, but also contribute to the meaning of people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN. In order to do so, AICHR was given mandates to conduct a series of dialogues and consultations with stakeholders with the aim to foster the feeling of being part of ASEAN among the population.

Engaging people on issues that are close to their heart such as human rights means that AICHR needs to have listening skills and an ability to translate the stories on human rights into policies that benefit victims and survivors. Moreover, the Terms of Reference has no prohibition for AICHR to listen to the stories of victims and survivors. It is, in fact, AICHR's responsibility to develop human rights strategies and policy supports in ASEAN. Furthermore, human rights and freedom are guaranteed in the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration.

Hence, I would like to use this opportunity to thank those who have been very brave to re-open the wounds and trust me with their stories since my day-one of holding this position. Their stories have guided my work in AICHR, especially in making decisions, setting my priorities, and formulating my positions. For me, their human rights stories and experiences matter.

Finally, I believe forming an ASEAN identity cannot be forced, but should be internalized and decided by the people. The role of member states and ASEAN, as an intergovernmental regional organisation, is to provide avenues and platforms where LGBTQIA people can feel that they are treated just and equally, their human rights are respected, they are accepted, listened to, acknowledged, appreciated, and engaged with, regardless of who they are.

Jakarta, 14 November 2020

Yuyun Wahyuningrum
Representative of Indonesia to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), 2019-2021

Editor's Notes

By EARLY SOL A. GADONG

The honor of editing the very first edition of the ASEAN Queer Imaginings has been enlightening and exhilarating at the same time. It is a progressive collection of voices that have been, in one way or another, relegated to the dark, grey, and muted sections of conversations about the ASEAN region. These thoughts and insights are now upon us in bright, loud colors, demanding to be heard and listened to.

The collection takes us around different significant places in Southeast Asia, starting with Saigon, where An's *Imagining a Queer Memory Collective* invites us to take stock of how institutional archives have violently silenced narratives that could have contributed to our queer memories in the region.

Mikee Inton Campbell's *Transnational Transness* illuminates the reader on how our Southeast Asian queer identities connect us as a regional collective. This connectedness becomes even more apparent in examples found in Thailand's struggles with Islamophobia, illustrated by Chutchaya (Bloom) Siriwattakanon's *You Are the Threat to Our Community!*, and Indonesia's uphill battle with maintaining queer activists' mental health, discussed by Vica Larasati in *To Keep Queer Activists Sane, Safety, and Healthy in ASEAN Context.*

Midway into this collection, Joel Mark Baysa-Barredo calls us to begin *Igniting the Transformation of a Queer ASEAN* using the Yogyakarta principles, and given how effective transformation is a process that requires us to be introspect, Cambodia's Meth Monthary beautifully reflects on their identity in *Being Gay, Khmer and Buddhist* while Ninar Thanita Wongprasert asserts the power of fashion in *Undressing Discrimination*.

As the collection comes to a close, we are challenged by Nurdiyansah Dalidjo's *Considering ASEAN's Future in the Current LGBT Situation* to learn from what is happening in the queer activism landscape of Indonesia to move forward in our desire to strengthen the LGBTQIA community. Finally, we end on a strong note through Ng Yi-Sheng's call to action in Painted Shadows --- for us to "live so as not to be forgotten."

I thank the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus for making me a part of this important milestone in ASEAN's *queerstory* and I look forward to the many more conversations this collection will spark.

Early Sol A. Gadong
Editor, ASEAN Queer Imaginings

01

Imagining a Queer Memory Collective

By AN

Reflections On Nhung Đinh's Practice

Driving along Lê Du ẩn street in Saigon, passing numbered trees contouring its shape gives one a grandeur sense of bearing witness to a historical timeline, each trunk a line break, a monument. It is on this street that the National Archives II occupies its space, among the French Embassy, the American Embassy, the German House, a corporate hotel, the Saigon Zoo, and Botanical Gardens sits on one of the streets' ends and the Independence Palace another.

The Saigon Zoo constitutes an archive too, despite not being called one. Established in 1864 and modeled after the "exotic" aesthetics of the Jardin des Plants, the zoo acts as a colonial archive of the Indochinese natural world, serving the panoptic thirst of the empire for exploitation.[1]

The word archive comes from the Greek word arkheion, which means "a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded."[2] The archive not only belongs to the field of commencement but also of commandment: a place from which those with power sanction, authorize, command, legitimize, control, rule, order. Political power is achieved through the "control of the archive," and, to a certain extent, of memory.[3]

In the archive, memories are filed, captured, and turned into useful evidence by those who were given access. Navigating the world as queers can often feel like being in a state of exile, ostracized from the archive's doors, history, and public memory at large. The desire for historical recovery and restoration of queer heritage that is assumed to be lost at sea is a tempting pursuit.

I myself have felt this desire, especially when faced with rhetorics that render queerness as foreign to the culture I call home. A search for historical queer evidence in the archive is not completely yieldless. The colonial archive and national newspaper archive reveal Richard Quang Anh Tran's work highlights gender-crossing in male poets and male

1 P. Brocheux and D. Hemery, *Indochina: an Ambiguous Colonization, 1858-1954* (California: University of California Press, 2011).
2 J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression (*Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 9.
3 J. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 11.

friendship in Vietnam's classical tradition;[4] Kirsten Endres' research on hầu đồng[5], Nguyễn Quốc Vinh's work on homoeroticism in Vietnamese literature during French colonial rule. Projects such as Vietnam Queer History Month also demonstrate an effort to pinpoint queer bodies in the domains of what is considered textbook history, with a hope to construct a queer lineage within dominant historical knowledge of Vietnam, said its founder in a documentary.[6]

However, when turning to look for scholarship and language that center queer bodies that are assigned female at birth, I was met with mostly blurred vestiges and next-to-nothings. Huong Thu Nguyen's research on gender variance in the central highlands echoes this difficulty and impossibility of recovering these traces in historical records as well as in her own methodology, compared to male-bodied persons.[7] The language used to identify queer AFAB was also a melting pot of English terms, a few Vietnamese slangs, re-appropriated words, and translated words. I live in these translations, foreign lexicons, borrowed nouns, in a home that these words have afforded me, wondering what is lost in translation.

But why this trust in the archive that will somehow restore us, recover us whole, and even legitimize us? While efforts to mine the national and imperial archive for queer bodies can be useful in disproving othering rhetorics, making it the primary focus risks equating queer history restoration with gaining a repatriation flight ticket, an acceptance of queer identities within the larger umbrella of a national identity without questioning the violence of the very idea of citizenship.

An archive orchestrates a togetherness of memories. However, this orchestration also dictates what can be said about the past, what are memorable and forgettable, which counts as evidence and which does not. Its usage of memories often serves the interest of nations, empires, capitalism, and institutions, rather than communities. Yet, memories also escape arrest, orchestration, officiation, classification, standards, and

4 R. Tran, "From Red Lights to Red Flags: A History of Gender in Colonial and Contemporary Vietnam" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2011).
5 K. Endres, Performing the Divine: Mediums, Markets and Modernity in Urban Vietnam (NIAS Press, 2011).
6 Quang Nong Nhat, "Queer Asia - Vietnam: Episode 1 - Our Queer History," video, 21:44, https://www.gagaoolala.com/en/videos/1000/queer-asia-vietnam-doc-2018-e01.
7 Nguyen Huong Thu, *"Navigating identity, ethnicity and politics: A case study of gender variance in the Central Highlands of Vietnam"*, NORMA 11, no. 4 (2016): 258.

infrastructure, and yearns for other ways to connect, other forms of togetherness and belongings.

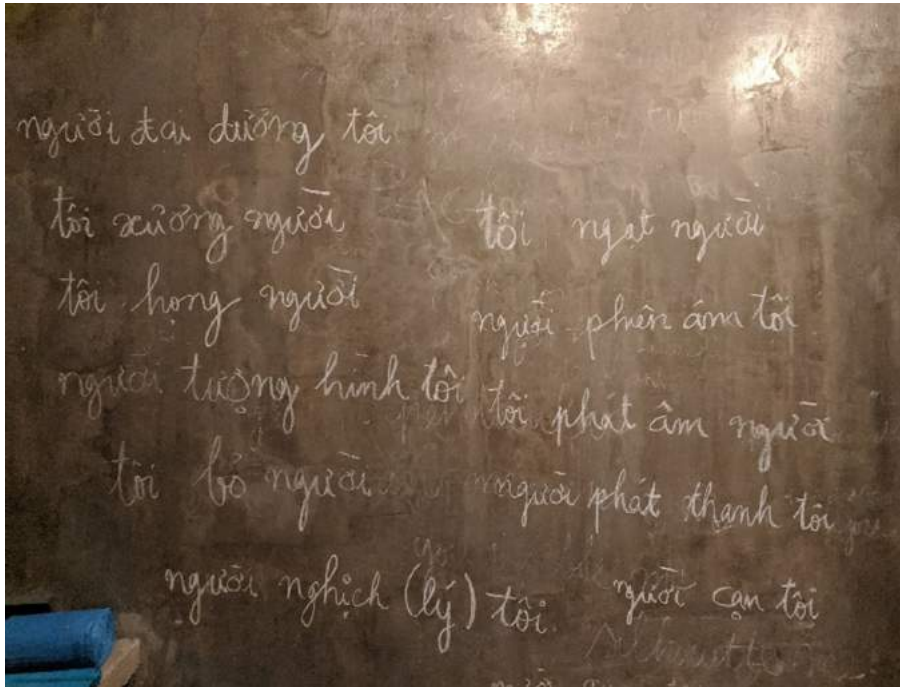
Looking at two community art projects initiated by Nhung Đinh, a queer artist, curator and activist based in Hanoi, I want to imagine a queer memory collective as one of such forms and explore its possibilities in undoing the world-shaping effects of the archive and opening up different modes of sharing knowledge outside the language of legitimacy and officiality.

I first met Nhung in 2018 at an exhibition for Bàn Lộn, a community art project that invites people to express their interpretation of the vagina through drawings and mediums of their choices. An artist and curator living in Hanoi, Nhung describes herself as a quêer (a portmanteau of queer and quê, a Vietnamese word to describe someone who is unsophisticated) auntie who likes to collect objects. In a hostel's common room in Saigon, about 300 to 400 drawings were kept alongside reading materials, thick folders containing stories, statements, musings, sentiments, recallings attached to each one written by the people who drew them. The artworks are the result of a week-long workshop and some of Bàn Lộn's past collections. Coming inside the space resembles entering a conversation, as Nhung would start talking about stories behind the drawings on the wall, how they arrived, her past projects. Then, participants would trade gossips, make jokes, and engage in silly back-and-forths. Objects were re-lived and made alive through Nhung's tellings, the collection of drawings and the bodies that come and go extend themselves into a social gathering.

Drawings on the wall at the exhibition of Bàn Lộn. (Photo via Saigoneer)

Two years later, I met Nhung again in Saigon. This time, it was through a public invitation to build a queer museum together at Sàn Art, an art space in Saigon where Nhung was also staying for her residency. Staying true to Nhung's participatory and relational spirit, the museum invites people to bring their objects, create artworks, hang out, gossip, eat and drink together, perform, indulge in sharing stories and experiences, read poetry, and basically inhabit the space in whatever ways they want. An old MP3 player, a portrait, an ongoing photography exhibition, a fingering hand made out of rice and a plastic glove, a poetry-filled toilet, and someone's birthday all occupied the same space during the course of one week. The museum is queer/queered in the sense that its exhibiting function is troubled – objects making and displaying is more of a gateway to be together, and a result of such being-together. Every object in the space is coupled with the presence of the person or community they belong to.

Queer museum in Saigon. (Photo by the author)



Toilet poetry. (Photo by the author)

Memories dwell in these places and intermingle, so that people came out of these encounters carrying a bit of dust from someone's memories, emotions, traces of each other's presences. A queer memory collective, contrary to a collection, denotes some level of sociality, a social formation that refuses to be boxed in, neither fully domestic nor public.

In her book on queer phenomenology, Sara Ahmed posits: "If history in some sense is about the reachable (as things must be reached to "enter" the records), then history can also be described as a process of domestication—of making some objects and not others available as what we "can" reach.[8]

An archive contains these reachables, hence, the knowledge produced from them only mirrors the archive's reach and the forms it captured after such reach takes place. Yet, the archive still assumes a totalizing claim to historical knowledge of society at large. Government records, letters, institutional documents, written text, scanned newspapers, dates, timelines, stamps, papers, prints, photos, museum objects --- what can't be reached by these forms?

A queer memory collective can be a refusal to carry the burden of proof or the need to find a "history that sanctions our existence," undoing the archive's evidentiary assumption.[9] As Joseph Esteban Munoz has put it, instead of concrete visible evidence, queerness is often "transmitted covertly" in forms of "innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances" that will evaporate "at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility."[10] A queer memory collective can be incorporeal, undoing the forms in which archival objects take, to loosen its rigidity.

"A queer museum is no museum at all, I think," Nhung said during a talk held inside the queer museum itself, recounting the problems she faced in the national and global museum system when trying to display queer

8 S. Ahmed. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2007): 117.
9 N. Shah, "Sexuality, Identity and the Use of History," in Q&A: Queer in Asian American, ed. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom (Temple University Press), 149.
10 J. Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," Women & Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory, 8, no. 2 (1996): 6.

objects she collected over the years in an exhibition titled The Cabinet. When working with museums in Vietnam, licensing and censorship remain dense networks that stop certain queer objects and their stories from getting out. A museum, as exhibition space for archive, reifies absence, while hiding an object's history of being made absent.

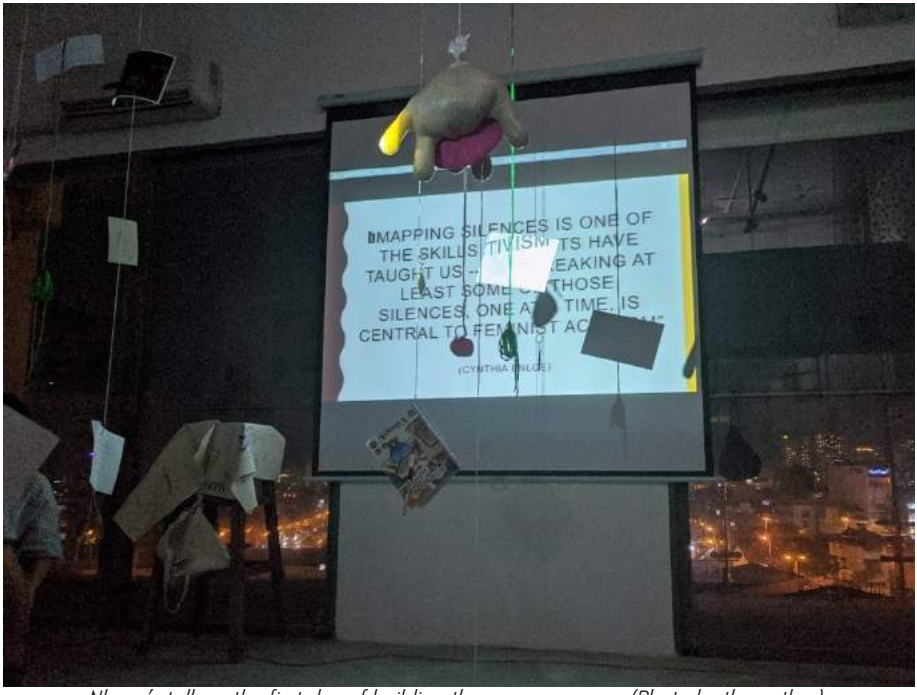
The global museum system was no better. Nhung recalled an incident when photographic records of the people's queer objects which she curated were brought into a Swedish museum institution without crediting her labor and did a disservice in representing the community from which these objects originate. This was particularly interesting as it brings up an important look at the limits to the politics of display that is also evident in Nhung's past work.

One detail from Nhung's talk I keep coming back to is that in her The Cabinet exhibition, in which artefacts were displayed in white cabinets, there was one that was empty and locked, a tranquil refusal of display, and perhaps a critique of the very form that the project takes shape. Not everything is meant to be exposed, exhibited, or made visible.

Ariella Azoulay reminds us that archival regime, manifested through institutions like museums, depends on looting and violent recontextualizaton and displacement of objects from their communities. These characteristics do not exclude museums that inwardly cloaked the language of LGBTQ visibility and advocacy. I believe that a queer memory collective should do away with a dependency on extractivism and head towards a commons.

The empty cabinet can also be read in a different light, as a willful display of an evidence that something has been made absent. When I think back to my struggle searching for queer women in historical scholarship, the absence I faced was not a real-life absence (despite being represented as such) but rather the archive's silencing effects. Absence can be a useful site for resistance and critical inquiry. A queer memory collective can be built on visible absence as well.

11 A. Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso, 2019), 211.
12 A. Azoulay, *Potential History*, 186.



Nhung's talk on the first day of building the queer museum. (Photo by the author)

However, this is not to say that absence can only be useful when it is mapped and made seen. In her research on the les community in Saigon, Natalie Newton cautions against focusing on a politics that only uses visibility as activism tactics, as queer invisibility is not always a sign of marginalization – intentional and contingent invisibility can be a strategic site for community building.[13] A queer memory collective can be hidden in plain sight.

An archive produces its own myth, the myth of a historical timeline, the past, the narrative of progress, a progressive temporality that reduces "incommensurable experience of people into a rigid tale of advancement."[14] It is a straightening device.[15]

13 N. Newton, "Contingent Invisibility," GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 22, no. 1 (2015): 112.
14 A. Azoulay, *Potential History*, 167.
15 S. Ahmed. Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others (Duke University Press, 2007): 137.

An archive, then, also polices the mind, confines connections, imaginations, solidarity within the past-present-future progression, within the fictions of colonial geography and histography.

Southeast Asia as a region, as scholars have pointed out, was also a discursive construction.[16] Fictions that cause truth affects and shapes a world of lived reality. A deeper conversation between queer cultural activism, memories, and the task of unlearning could open a space for a form of counter-togetherness, where a history of queer possibilities can be explored without the need to fit our bodies into a straightened historical lineage.

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16 A. Herianto, "Can there be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies?," *Moussons,* No. 5 (2002): 308.

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02

Transnational Transness: Imagining the connections between Southeast Asian queer identities

By MIKEE INTON-CAMPBELL

It's a cold, winter evening here in Dunedin, New Zealand. The place where I live is closer, approximately, to the South Pole than it is to my hometown – Manila. And so it is with much nostalgia (and the longing to feel some warmth) that I write this essay, pondering the connections between understandings of queerness in the cultures of three Southeast Asian countries – the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia.

The way gender is understood in this part of the world may be radically different from the way the rest of the world sees gender. For one, contemporary ways of understanding the gender/sexuality divide may have eclipsed local ways of knowing, which see the individual in a rather more wholistic fashion – that is, that sexuality is not divisible from gender performance. The SOGIESC framework, which has widely been accepted as the lingua franca of human rights advocacy work around queer issues, posits divisions between one's sexed body and one's gender identity. I do not mean to argue against the usefulness of this framework, however. I understand that this framework has its uses and is flexible enough to be able to accommodate what we have come to call precolonial or indigenous identities. My task in this essay is to examine these "indigenous identities" and to posit possible connections among them.

In the Philippines, gender operates on a sort of typology – a four-level hierarchy that combines ideas of the sexed body, gendered performance, and sexual orientation, as reflected in the nonsensical childhood rhyme "Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy," which functions as a local version of sorts to the English play-rhyme, "eeny, meeny, miny, mo." The Tagalog word for this gender matrix is kasarian, which literally means 'type', signifying how ultimately less restrictive it is compared to words like gender or sex in English.[1] In this matrix, the babae (cisgender, heterosexual woman) and the lalaki (cisgender, heterosexual man) are considered the normative genders, while the purported non-normative genders are the bakla and the tomboy. Paying closer attention to the bakla allows us to see how this gender matrix may be related to the Thai gender matrix – phet.

Bakla is a Tagalog term that conflates ideas of male homosexuality, effeminacy, cross-dressing, and transgenderism. In a sense, it is a word that does not fit neatly within the SOGIESC framework because it is both a sexual orientation and a gender expression. In my own academic

1 J. Neil Garcia. "Performativity, the bakla, and the orientalizing gaze," Inter-Asia Cultural Studies 1(2) (2000): 7.

work on bakla cinema in the Philippines, I've come to propose a theory of sorts for kabaklaan (being bakla) – in that I see it as a possible means of understanding what we now contemporarily call gay men and trans women.

Over the years, I have dealt with the question of what exactly kabaklaan means. Is the bakla a gay man or a trans woman? My answer is that it is both but also neither. The bakla has roots in the gender-crossing babaylan of pre-colonial Philippines, who acted as spiritual and social leaders in ancient times and embodied both male and female spirits. Before Spanish occupation, many local cultures in the Philippines practiced a form of religious animism headed mostly by women – thus, women occupied a social rank in pre-colonial Philippines that paralleled that of men.[2] But women were considered more spiritually linked to the animist gods. Babaylanism was an occupation dominated by women but it was not exclusive to female persons.[3] Males would be allowed to perform the babaylan function provided they took on the garb and mannerisms of women.[4] The babaylan, however, were not merely cross-dressers, as many of the Spanish friars had written in their annals. The male babaylanes were, for the most part, socially accepted and treated as women.[5] This means that they shared all the rights, roles, and responsibilities of (cisgender) women. The babaylanes were also known to take on husbands of their own.[6]

While the contemporary bakla has retained traditional vestiges of babaylanism (cross-dressing, effeminacy, and sexual desire directed at the masculine lalake), it lost its position of privilege in society through centuries of Spanish Catholic rule, which coded the practice of babaylan shamanism as demonic and immoral, and the incursion of American psychiatric discourse, which emphasized the pathology of both homosexuality and transgenderism.[7] The incursion of other labels like MSM (men who have sex with men), from HIV/AIDS discourses, and the Eurocentric political "gay" label have posed problems for the bakla. From

2 J. Neil Garcia, *Philippine gay culture: Binabae to bakla, silahis to MSM, 2nd Edition* (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 2008), 158, 162.
3 Garcia, *Philippine gay culture: Binabae to bakla, silahis to MSM, 2nd Edition,* 162.
4 Garcia, *Philippine gay culture: Binabae to bakla, silahis to MSM, 2nd Edition,* 163.
5 Garcia, *Philippine gay culture: Binabae to bakla, silahis to MSM, 2nd Edition,* 165.
6 Garcia, *Philippine gay culture: Binabae to bakla, silahis to MSM, 2nd Edition,* 181.
7 Garcia, *Philippine gay culture: Binabae to bakla, silahis to MSM, 2nd Edition;* Michael Tan, "Sickness and Sin: Medical and Religious Stigmatization of Homosexuality in the Philippines," in *Ladlad: Anthology of Philippine Gay Writing, Vol. 1* (Pasig, Metro Manila: Anvil Publishing, 1994).

being ancient spiritual leaders and healers in the form of the babaylan, the bakla came to be identified with the occupations of fashion design and hairstyling.[8] The most pervasive stereotype of the bakla since the '70s is that of the parlorista: a low-income beauty salon worker.[9]

More recently, this writer also examined kabaklaan in relation to transgender discourse.[10] In 2008, the Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines coined the term "transpinay" to refer to transgender women of Filipino descent.[11] Unlike the terms gay or bakla, transpinay does not connote sexual orientation but gender identity; not does it connote surgical status (in that transpinays can be non-operative, pre-operative, or post-operative transsexuals).[12] While both the bakla and the trans woman are commonly defined by the mismatch between their bodies and their internally held beliefs, transgenderism is rooted in psychiatric discourse – i.e., the persistent pathologization of gender dysphoria and gender incongruence. The bakla, on the other hand, finds the root of this mismatch in her spirit – her female/feminine kalooban (interior), and her external body. Her gender performance/expression can be read as her internal femininity being manifested through the external body/dress/manner.

But bakla is also often seen as a 'third gender' of sorts, an in-between identity that sits in the middle of the masculine-feminine spectrum. Thailand's phet gender system thinks of the kathoey in the same way. Phet is a three-sexed model of gender and sexuality that works on the binary continuum of male and female. Like kasarian, it is an integrative system that includes ideas of sex, gender, and sexuality.[13] The phu-chai (person who is chai) denotes maleness, masculinity, and manhood while

8 Garcia, *Philippine gay culture: Binabae to bakla, silahis to MSM, 2nd Edition*, 87.
9 Bobby Benedicto, "The haunting of gay Manila," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies 14, no. 2-3 (2008): 318.*
10 Mikee N. Inton, "Bodies in transition: The bakla as transgender," in *The Sage Handbook of Global Sexualities, Vol. 2.* Ed. By Zowie Davy, Ana Cristina Santos, Chiara Bertone, Ryan Thoreson, and Saskia Wieringa (UK: Sage Publishing, 2020).
11 Sass Rogando Sasot, *Our Brave New World: A Brief History of the Birth of the Transgender Movement in the Philippines* (2011).
12 Sasot, *Our Brave New World: A Brief History of the Birth of the Transgender Movement in the Philippines.*
13 Peter Jackson and Gerard Sullivan (eds.), *Lady boys, tom boys, rent boys: Male and female homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand* (New York: Haworth Press, Inc., 1999), 5.

word phu-ying denotes femaleness, femininity, and womanhood.[14] The intermediary category between these above terms is the kathoey, a label that denotes people (male or female) whose gender expressions were misaligned to their sex.[15] Rosalind Morris argues that this historical three-sexed model was developed in a society structured around discourses of gender, which is a stark contrast to western models of gender that are structured around discourses of sexual identity.[16] Both models, one based on gender, the other on sexual identity, are "irreconcilable but coexistent sex/gender systems" still prevalent in contemporary times.[17]

Peter Jackson argues, however, that phet has consistently and successfully resisted the formation of a domain of sexuality that is distinct from that of gender.[18] All varieties of phet include a varying blend of different degrees of masculinity and femininity.[19] These varieties include the kathoey (transgender/transsexual/transvestite), the gay king (masculine sexually active male partner), the gay queen (masculine sexually receptive male partner), the quing (sexually versatile male), the seua bai ("bisexual tigers", bisexual men), the tom (masculine lesbian), and the dee (from lady; the feminine lesbian).[20]

Western conceptions of gender performance and the articulations of various forms of desire, however, have also influenced contemporary Thai urban cultures in developing more abstract notions of phet.[21] Western-educated Thai academics coined the terms rak-ruam-phet (same-phet love) to denote homosexuality and rak-tang-phet (other-phet love) to denote heterosexuality.[22] The term gay has been borrowed into

14 Jackson and Sullivan, *Lady boys, tom boys, rent boys: Male and female homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand,* 4; Peter Jackson, "Gay Adaptation, Tom-Dee Resistance, and Kathoey Indifference: Thailand's Gender/Sex Minorities and the Episodic Allure of Queer English," in Speaking in queer tongues: *Globalization and gay language*, ed. William L. Leap and Tom Boellstorff (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 208.
15 Jackson and Sullivan, *Lady boys, tom boys, rent boys: Male and female homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*, 4.
16 Jackson and Sullivan, *Lady boys, tom boys, rent boys: Male and female homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*, 5.
17 Jackson and Sullivan, *Lady boys, tom boys, rent boys: Male and female homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*, 5.
18 Peter Jackson (ed.), *Queer Bangkok: 21st century markets, media, and rights* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 5.
19 Jackson, *Queer Bangkok: 21st century markets, media, and rights*, 3.
20 Jackson, *Queer Bangkok: 21st century markets, media, and rights,* 3; Jackson and Sullivan, *Lady boys, tom boys, rent boys: Male and female homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand,* 5.
21 Jackson, "Gay Adaptation, Tom-Dee Resistance, and Kathoey Indifference," 208.
22 Jackson, "Gay Adaptation, Tom-Dee Resistance, and Kathoey Indifference," 208.

contemporary Thai urban cultures as a way for homosexual men to distance themselves from the effeminate connotations attached to the kathoey.[23] With the rapid growth of Thailand's tourism industry, which has a very strong emphasis on gay tourism, and the mobility of middle- and upper-class Thai gays who are able to afford education in Western universities, an increase in the depiction of homonormative homosexuality (masculine gay men) in Thai media can be noted.[24] With the masculinization of the Thai gay man, the label kathoey came to be associated more with feminine males.[25]

Although often erroneously translated into Thai to mean 'homosexual,' kathoey actually connotes ideas of transgenderism, transsexualism, cross-dressing, or effeminacy in men. [26] The kathoey is not a homosexual man because their preferred sexual partners are not other homosexual men but gender normative males instead.[27] This is very similar to some notions of kabaklaan. Also like the transgender bakla, the kathoey has become closely associated with the aesthetics industry and sex work.[28]

Indonesia's archipelagic cultures offer rather similar ways of thinking around issues of sex/gender/sexuality. In most societies throughout the archipelago, gender and sexuality are not seen as mutually exclusive domains of meaning.[29] The Bahasa word for man is pria, while wanita refers to women.[30] The word waria, clipped by combining wantia and pria, refers to male-to-female transgenders or transvestites.[31] Oddly though, the national Bahasa language has absorbed the words gay and lesbi (from lesbian) to refer to non-crossdressing male homosexuals and feminine and masculine women (who think of themselves as "women with men's

23 Stephen O. Murray, "Increasingly Gay Self-Representations of Male-Male Sexual Experiences in Thailand," in *Lady boys, tom boys, rent boys: Male and female homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*, ed. Peter Jackson and Gerard Sullivan (New York: Haworth Press, Inc., 1999), 82.
24 Murray, "Increasingly Gay Self-Representations of Male-Male Sexual Experiences in Thailand," 84
25 Han Ten Brummelhuis, "Transformations of the Transgender: The Case of the Thai Kathoey," in *Lady boys, tom boys, rent boys: Male and female homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand,* ed. Peter A. Jackson and Gerard Sullivan (New York: Haworth Press, Inc., 1999), 121-140.
26 Brummelhuis, "Transformations of the Transgender: The Case of the Thai Kathoey," 123.
27 Brummelhuis, "Transformations of the Transgender: The Case of the Thai Kathoey," 129; Jackson and *Sullivan, Lady boys, tom boys, rent boys: Male and female homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand.*
28 Brummelhuis, "Transformations of the Transgender: The Case of the Thai Kathoey," 133.
29 Tom Boellstorff, The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 11.
30 Tom Boellstorff, "Authentic, Of Course!" *Gay* Language in Indonesia and Cultures of Belonging," in Speaking in queer tongues: *Globalization and gay language,* eds. William L. Leap and Tom Boellstorf, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 182.
31 Boellstorff, "Authentic, Of Course!" *Gay* Language in Indonesia and Cultures of Belonging," 182.

souls"). [32] But other terms are used in the archipelago: cewek (woman in colloquial Indonesian) refers to the more feminine lesbian partner, while the masculine female partner is called a tomboi.[33]
In most cultures throughout the archipelago, gender and sexuality are not seen as mutually exclusive domains of meaning.[34] The Bahasa word for man is pria, while wanita refers to women.[35] The word waria, clipped by combining wantia and pria, refers to male-to-female transgenders or transvestites.[36] Oddly though, the national Bahasa language has absorbed the words gay and lesbi (from lesbian) to refer to non-crossdressing male homosexuals and feminine and masculine women (who think of themselves as "women with men's souls").[37] But other terms are used in the archipelago: cewek (woman in colloquial Indonesian) refers to the more feminine lesbian partner, while the masculine female partner is called a tomboi.[38]

The Indonesian gay and lesbi though are not simply copies of their western counterparts – often, they are lower middle class or impoverished, and have very little exposure to western gay/lesbian media or people. Also, it is important to see that both gay and lesbi identities are national in scope and are not impeded by archipelagic cultures. [39] These contemporary sexual/gendered identities are complemented by historic and traditional practices that are still extant today. The bissu of Bugis culture in Southwestern Sulawesi are transvestite men who lead rituals for nobles, like weddings and childbirth, as well as fertility rites for the rice fields.[40] It is believed that bissus embody a perfect combination of male and female spirits, which makes them more strongly connected to the spirit world, and they are widely considered to be a third gender.[41] The bissu, however, is more of a profession rather than a gender.[42] Historically, female bissus were present, but in contemporary times, the bissu has come to be associated as a profession solely for transgender/transvestite males. The difference between the bissu and the waria lies with the former's ritualistic aspects, but in contemporary South Sulawesi, these distinctions

32 Boellstorff, *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia,* 9.
33 Boellstorff, *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia,* 9.
34 Boellstorff, *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia,* 11.
35 Boellstorff, "Authentic, Of Course!" Gay Language in Indonesia and Cultures of Belonging," 182.
36 Boellstorff, "Authentic, Of Course!" Gay Language in Indonesia and Cultures of Belonging," 182.
37 Boellstorff, *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia,* 9.
38 Boellstorff, *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia,* 9.
39 Boellstorff, *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia,* 7.
40 Boellstorff, The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia, 38.
41 Boellstorff, *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia,* 40.
42 Boellstorff, *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia,* 40.

are becoming more vague as many bissu have taken on occupations, like hair-dressing, that are more closely associated with the waria.[43]

There is so much more that can be said about Indonesia's many diverse ways of thinking about sex/gender/sexuality, but I feel that I have overrun the word limit. The point that I wanted to make was this: despite radically different histories of colonization, political and social structures, religious backgrounds, and ethnicities – these three Southeast Asian countries think about gender in very similar ways. We do not think that issues of gender are divorced from issues of sexuality. This little article was not meant as an extensive accounting of all the ways of thinking around gender in the locals of Southeast Asia. Rather, it is meant to start a conversation between the academics and activists who work within the region – especially in today's context of growing authoritarianism and rising conservatism, perhaps what we need is to look more closely at how our ancestors thought about themselves. Perhaps by focusing on our similar histories of struggle and rooting these into our indigenous ways of knowing, we might discover new ways of doing advocacy work as well.

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43 Boellstorff, *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia,* 39.

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03

“You Are the Threat to Our Community!” Combating Islamophobia Within Queer Communities and Activism in Thailand

By CHUTCHAYA (BLOOM) SIRIWATTAKANON[1]

Trigger warning: Islamophobia

On July 2nd 2020, I checked my Facebook feed. I was startled by disturbing news from Malaysia, on Thailand's reputable LGBTQ+ news outlet. The headline stated:

Malaysia's Religious Minister announced to rehabilitate trans people back to "normal." [2]

However, what was more disturbing was all Islamophobic comments underneath the news article post:

"Islam is a greedy religion"

"Muslim people must die".

"I'll splash them [Muslims]with pork oil!"

"I don't want the Sharia law in my country because of them!"

I am not a Muslim person; I am a Theravada Buddhist.[3]

Despite this, I feel frustrated and sympathetic as my best friend is a queer Muslim advocate. Since social media is a platform for many queer community members, imagine what would it be like for a queer Thai Muslim, who is already a double marginalized person in Thai society, to see such hateful comments. This, of course, will definitely break their heart. This is only one of the many examples of Islamophobia within our queer communities in Thailand.

Although Islamophobia is quite a new phenomenon within queer communities and activism in Thailand, it has become more intense in the past few years due to both internal and external influences. In this article, I will address Islamophobia within queer communities and activism in Thailand. At the end of this article, I will give some tips for non-Muslim queer activists (especially those who come from non-Muslim dominant

1 Pronouns: they,them,their.
2 ["Encourages Islamic police officers to arrest transgender people for a rehabilitation", Malaysia's Religious Minister announced to rehabilitate trans people back to "normal"], *Spectrum*, July 22, 2020, https://spectrumth.com/2020/07/22/.
3 Data from the website of the National Statistics Office of Thailand.

nations) on how to fight against Islamophobia within our communities/activism. As a caveat, the recommendations in this article may only be applicable to queer communities/activism in non-Muslim dominant SEA nations, especially the Theravada Buddhist dominant nations (such as Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia). It may not be adaptable for other contexts.

Islamophobia in Thai Mainstream Society

Islamophobia is "an exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims perpetuated by misinformation that results in bias, discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life".[4] Common examples in Thailand and the rest of the world are the prevalent stereotypes that Muslim people are terrorists, violent, sexist, and queerphobic.

Although Islamophobia in Thailand has not yet erupted to a level of full genocide like what is happening in Myanmar, Thailand's insurgency in the Deep South has become alarmingly intense within the past 15 years. There are only around 5% of the population who are Muslim and they are one of the most marginalized communities in the country despite Muslim and Buddhist communities having largely lived peacefully throughout our country's history until the 2000s.[5]

The country's anti-Muslim sentiments have occurred both offline and online. In 2017, in the Beung Kan province (Northeast Thailand), a group of villagers and Buddhist monks protested the construction of a Masjid in their village due to the fear of potential "terrorists".[6] Similar protests have been observed nationwide within the past few years. A number of Thai Muslim women report that they have faced harassments on the street such as being shouted at or having their hijab pulled from them in Bangkok and Chiang Mai.[7] Recently, Thailand's prime minister and military dictator, General Prayuth Chan-Ocha, encouraged the police to heavily surveillance all Muslim students on campuses,[7] while non-Muslim students were not subjected to the same surveillance by the state. The

4 Georgetown University, "What is Islamophobia," Accessed August 20, 2020, https://bridge.georgetown.edu/about-us/what-is-islamophobia/.
5 Tuansiri, Ekkarin & Anwar Koma, "A Fragile Society: Buddhist-Muslims Relations in Thailand in 2018-2019", *Walailak Journal of Social Science* 13.1 (2020):110.
6 Tuansiri & Koma, "A Fragile Society," 110.
7 Tuansiri & Koma, "A Fragile Society," 110.

most violent example of Islamophobia is the forced disappearance of Muslim community members and leaders (Imam) committed by the state in Southern Thailand.[8] There have been widespread circulations of hate speeches and fake news claiming that Muslims people would "conquer" and establish Sharia law in Thailand through social media platforms.[9]

Causes of Islamophobia in Thailand

There are external and internal factors which have established Islamophobic sentiments within mainstream Thai communities.

Among these external factors is the rise of Islamophobic discourse from the US after 9-11, and the consequent fear of ISIS.[11]Another external factor is the rise of the Buddhist nationalism movement from neighboring Burma, in response to the anti-Rohingya refugee movement. Myanmar's Buddhist nationalist has spread to Thailand, thus creating the homegrown extremists.

In terms of internal factors, the most prominent is the insurgency in Thailand's Deep South of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat from 2004 until today.[12] The separationists (mostly radical Muslims) are battling the ongoing colonization from our government, and has led to the irrational fear towards all Muslims nationwide. Another internal factor is the rise of homegrown Buddhist nationalist movements in Thailand, within the past few years sparked by those in neighboring Myanmar.[13] Although these movements in Thailand are not that extreme, they are becoming more visible. During the 2019 election campaign, the People's Reforming Party, a conservative Buddhist nationalist group, utilized covert Islamophobic discourses as part of their election campaigns claiming that they would "protect" Buddhism from "another religion."[14]

8 Leyal Khalife, "Thailand's PM encourages police's monitoring of Muslim students," Step Feed, September 18, 2019, https://stepfeed.com/thailand-s-pm-encourages-police-s-monitoring-of-muslim-students-7914.
9 Tuansiri & Koma, "A Fragile Society," 112.
10 Tuansiri & Koma, "A Fragile Society," 112.
11 Tuansiri & Koma, "A Fragile Society," 113.
12 Tuansiri &Koma, "A Fragile Society," 113.
13 Tuansiri &Koma, "A Fragile Society," 113.
14 Tuansiri &Koma, "A Fragile Society…", 114.

Islamophobia within queer communities and activism in Thailand

As Islamophobia from Thai mainstream communities became more visible, so did in Thai queer communities and activism. An external factor that has triggered Islamophobia within our queer communities and activism is the rapid rise of queerphobic climates from neighboring Muslim dominant nations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei just within the past few years. Meanwhile, a recent internal factor that has sparked anti-Muslim sentiments is the opposition of some Thai Muslims to the upcoming civil union bill.[15] As a result, queer and queer-friendly Muslims have faced unjustified backlashes and Islamophobia from non-Muslim queer activists and the community members.

While Islamophobia among queer communities mostly happens online, there have been cases of in-person Islamophobia as well. I have personally encountered a prominent senior queer Thai advocate who solely blamed ignorant Muslim politicians in Thailand as "obstacles" in achieving queer activism's success to push for the marriage equality bill without acknowledging dominant Buddhist opposition. Some non-Muslim queer people ridicule queer Muslims for not leaving their religion. Hence, queer Muslims experience triple exclusions in Thailand from mainstream society and from both their Muslim and Queer communities.

Are all Muslims queerphobic?

The answer is simply "no." Having Islam as a religion does not translate to being queerphobic or sexist. Muslims are diverse, hence there are also different interpretations of queerness. According to a Muslim Indonesian scholar, Husein Muhamad, Islam actually appreciates sexuality as a basis of human aspect or the gift from God which has to be managed in a healthy manner.[16] Islam teaches Muslims to have compassion and mercy especially for the vulnerable ones.[17] My trans Muslim Filipina friend, social advocate Rafiqah Sulaiman binti Abdullah, who is based in Aotearoa (New Zealand), says that Islam has been re-interpreted and exploited

15 Than Setthakij. ["The Muslims for Peace Foundation Opposing the Civil Union Bill"], Thansettakij Multimedia, July 10, 2020, www.thansettakij.com/content/441453.
16 ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC) and the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), *Sharia Law and the Principle of Non-discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation* (Quezon City: ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, 2019), https://aseansogiecaucus.org/images/resources/publications/20190905%20Sexual%20Orientation%20&%20Sharia%20Law,%20ASC-HRWG%20Publication.pdf.
17 ASC & HRW, "Sharia Law and the Principles".

by some extremists for political power and control promoting explicit queerphobia and sexism.

"We also have to remember that Islam is NOT a monolith. Muslim extremists do not represent actual Muslims. Islam isn't against women and queer people BUT extremists hijacked Islam for their own agenda," says Rafiqah. We have to be aware that there are a number of non-queer Muslims who support queer rights. Also, queer Muslims and queer Muslim advocates exist, too. Therefore, it is unfair to stereotype all Muslims as queerphobic.

Addressing Islamophobia within our LGBT communities and activism (for non-Muslim dominant nations)

1. *Remember that queer activism is intersectional, so it needs to embrace people from different identities*. Amar Alfikar, a Muslim Indonesian transman activist from Indonesia Transgender Network, reminds us that healthy queer activism is all about inclusivity:

"When it comes to queer activism, it is important that we believe in human rights without prejudice toward any identity. How can we fight against queerphobia when we are Islamophobic? Also, islamophobes cannot help our queer Muslim friends because it doubles or even triples the burden and discrimination/hatred toward them. We want to fight against all stigma spurred by societies who say that "queer people are sexual predators," and refer to those criminals who did sexual violence, whose identities are non-hetero. It is the same with saying that all Muslims are extremist, all Muslims are violating queer people. Isn't that generalization?"[18]

We need to remember that queer people exist in any community, including Thai Muslim ones. Therefore, queer activism needs to include all different aspects of queer/trans/non-binary people regardless of age, class, ethnicity, abilities, or faith.

2. *Call people out!* If you spot any Islamophobic occurrences perpetuated by a queer advocate or member whether offline or online, call it out. I understand this is nerve-wracking BUT staying silent means you are complicit in Islamophobia within our community and activism too. If it happens online, at least report to the admin of a particular site, if you

18 Personal conversation with author, August 2, 2020.

want to remain anonymous. If you think you might face a threat after you call out, please seek support from your fellow advocates or community members who are also Muslim-friendly.

3. *Create collaborations with Muslims queers or queer-friendly Muslims.* This will create a safe space that opens a bridge between non-Muslim queer communities and non-queer/ queer Muslim communities. This will lead to more dialogue for better understanding. This would lessen irrational fear among the non-Muslim queer communities through education. This kind of initiative is already happening in Thailand's deep south. One example of this is in Pattani, where a local non-Muslim queer activist established a bookstore called "BUKU," which aims to break the barrier between Buddhists and Muslims and provide a safe space for both queer Muslim and Buddhists.[19] I suggest conducting more interfaith workshops across the nation to fill the divide.

4. *Be critical with your own religious community.* Yes, I acknowledge that Islamic extremism exists and is a genuine concern. However, before solely blaming Muslims, we as non-Muslims and especially as Thailand's Theravada Buddhists, need to acknowledge the extremists in Buddhism too. They are hardly acknowledged and not put under the spotlight. The reason is that we have "Buddhist privilege" due to Theravada Buddhism being a norm in Thai society. This allows some of us to scapegoat Muslim people for all negative occurrences in the country. Several mainstream Buddhist temples run a campaign which aim to "cure" queer male-assigned children to become "proper" men through ordination.[20] Sadly, many Thai Theravada Buddhists who support same sex marriage are the same ones who oppose openly queer Buddhist monks because they see them as a tarnish to the religion. There is even a widespread rhetoric from some prominent Theravada Buddhist monks who state that "queer people are the result of bad karma from past lives due to adultery" which has led to the justification of discrimination towards queer Buddhists.[21]

19 "Buku Bookstore in Pattani," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/bukupattani.
20 Chutchaya Siriwattakanon, "You're the shame of our family! Understanding the Experience of Family Violence Against Queer Youth/Children in Thailand" (BA Hons Dissertation, The University of Auckland, 2018), 40.
21 Siriwattakanon, "You're the shame of our family," 40.

Perhaps as a final reminder to our fellow queer activists or community members who are non-Muslim: solely blaming Muslims oppresses our Muslim minorities, especially queer Muslim people-who are already triply marginalized in Thailand or elsewhere in non-Muslim dominant nations. This goes against the spirit of equality and acceptance that we have been fighting for.

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04

To Keep Queer Activists Sane, Safety, and Healthy in ASEAN Context

A discussion about integrated security as holistic response and strategic to overcoming sexual-and-gender specific risk situation for queer activists

By VICA LARASATI

Being an ASEAN queer activist can be powerful, but it can also be challenging and dangerous at the same time. This is not only because of ignorance, or because there is a legal vacuum regarding the promotion and protection of LGBTIQ rights as human rights both in the country and ASEAN level. This is also partly due to narrow-minded perspectives amongst societies with regards to their cultural, religious, and social norms and values in embracing sexism, patriarchy, and cis heteronormativity.

Human rights defenders face common challenges; there are a number of obstacles and response strategies specific to their sexual and gender identities as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and non-binary persons who defend their personal and collective rights. Echoing Jane Barry and Vieda Neinar, we consider the importance of integrated security that resonates freedom from constant threats, economic security, political security, environmental security, and health security, which encompass the dimensions of "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear".[1] Therefore, in this paper, I would like to discuss the importance and significance of security and protection mechanisms in personal, organizational, state, and ASEAN contexts, focusing on precautionary measures and restoration processes that address and prioritize the diverse needs of queer activists. Moreover, to bring some perspective, I will share my research findings in Indonesia on integrated security and mechanism for LBQ women and Transgender men activists.

Indonesia may have a legitimate constitution that guarantees human rights and understands that human rights are inherent to all human beings, regardless of nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. Unfortunately, Indonesian laws regulating human rights implementation and monitoring are limited. Their interpretation and application are influenced by culture, religious norms, and values. These gaps create a space for promoting discrimination towards those who are perceived to not fit with Indonesian culture, religious norms, and values, including those who defend the rights of LBQ women and Transgender men communities. The study shows that Indonesian LBQ women and transgender men activists could not enjoy their lives as Indonesian citizens while working to defend the personal

1 B K. Bennet, D. Ingleton, A.M. Nah, and J. Savage, *"Critical Perspectives on the Security and Protection of Human Rights Defenders,"* The International Journal of Human Rights 19, No. 7 (2015).

and collective rights of LGBTIQ communities.[2] They must deal with layers of sexual-and-gender based discrimination, both in personal and public space. Their risk situation is elevated if they are come out as lesbian, bisexual women, queer, or transgender men as they have to overcome attempts from family members to participate in various of therapy conversion.[3] In Aceh, LBQ women and Transgender men activists are not able to conduct their work and live freely without restrictions due to Qanun Jinayat implementation. So, they have to constantly play a dangerous game of hide and seek with Syariah Police.

The rules of clothing under Qanun Jinayat that required Aceh Muslim women to wear loose clothes and hijab are mostly used to target LBQ women and Transgender men activists who refuse to perform accordingly. Additionally, an article on adultery that prohibits members of the opposite sex from being too close can be used to target LBQ women and Transgender men activists if they hang out together with their partner. Meanwhile, in Jakarta, although the culture welcomes the diversity and access to information and services that support works of LBQ women and Transgender men activists, they can easily be targeted by the hatred and brutality of media exposure and the national political situation that zeroed in on LGBT communities, such as the LGBT Crackdown in 2016, or the Judicial Review Process of AILA Proposal.[4]

Some LBQ women and Transgender men activists do not receive decent financial, mental, and physical support to ensure their personal well-being. This is due to limited funding for LBQ women and Transgender men collectives or organizations, and the low level of awareness to integrate self-care and personal well-being as security and protection mechanism

2 The study was designed to get overview activism of defending personal and collective rights of LBQ women and Transgender men in Indonesia. In particular, to understand integrated security and protection mechanism while living and working as Indonesian LBQ women and Transgender man activists. The research conducted using participatory action research and data were collected through semi-structured interview, observation, and desk-research. Participants of the research are key person and/or chair of women and LBTQ organization that located in Banda Aceh, DKI Jakarta and Surakarta; also, Commissioner at National Commission on Violence Against Women.

3 To 'heal' them into a 'normal person' according to society's understanding and belief, including forced to get married and become marital rape victims, or forced to perform just like gender that assigned at birth, religious-based exorcism rituals - Ruqya in Muslim context, or went to Psychiatrist or Psychologist.

4 During the research, I identified some events that contribute to national political situation. The events are LGBT Crackdown in 2016, Judicial Review of Criminal Code Article 284, 285, 292 (AILA Proposal), Parliament Proposal to create a bill that criminalizes LGBT, criminal crime which put LGBT communities as perpetrator or victims, or false accusation towards LBTQ communities.

within the organizational budget, program, and policy. This is in addition to an increasing number of discriminative by-laws in Indonesia every year that target or specifically mention LBQ women and Transgender men communities and activists.

Those risk situations have resulted to LBQ women and Transgender men's traumatic experiences and multiple burdens of enormous workloads, high levels of chronic stress, and limitations or even restrictions to the fulfillment of their rights and enjoyment as a human being. On the other hand, the existing securities and protection mechanisms still focus to respond to significant threats only from public space related to physical and digital securities, which are mostly just implemented or developed after significant events or immediate situations. These mechanisms merely only focus on legal or digital restoration processes. Meanwhile, mechanisms that focus on precautionary measures and restoration processes which address and prioritizes the diverse needs of Indonesian LBQ women and Transgender men activists are limited. Indonesian human rights institutions such as Komnas HAM, Komnas Perempuan and Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia (KPAI) still do not perform at the maximum level to pursue forward-looking strategies to strengthen national actions to promote and protect LBQ women and Transgender men activists and communities.

These findings about LBQ women and transgender men activists in Indonesia could be a reflection of, and a reminder about, significant threats of being queer activists in most countries in Southeast Asia – particular those who are member states of ASEAN. Furthermore, I have identified at least three (3) critical factors that elevates risk situation of being ASEAN queer activists:

1. Ignorance of the ASEAN Head of State to push for the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity within the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD), which creates minimum protection for, and promotion of, LGBTIQ communities in ASEAN State Members.

2. Hold on to normative standards of being a part of ASEAN Community that excludes the diversity of cultures, values, traditions, perspectives, beliefs, and social norms that are inherent and developed in ASEAN State members.

3. ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) that do not perform at the maximum level to pursue forward-looking strategies to strengthen the regional cooperation on human rights, including promoting and protecting LGBTIQ rights and ASEAN queer activists.

Furthermore, if ASEAN queer activists have to constantly deal with significant threats from their personal circle (family members, partner, friends), society (neighbor, working place, community), state, and ASEAN community – the movement will finally be shrinking due to personal exhaustion. Therefore, it is a priority to develop a protection mechanism to fully respond to the significant ongoing threats and to focus on precautionary measures and restoration processes which address and prioritizes the diverse needs of queer activists in Southeast Asia communities. We have to start a discussion amongst us so that we can recognize the connectedness of the different security issues in public and private spaces. Our movement must be integrative and holistic to understand that security is for the individual and community.[5] We also have to acknowledge the importance of integrated security which means focusing on employment, social well-being, development, and national sovereignty in terms of natural resources.

In the study, Indonesian LBQ women and transgender men activists share their thoughts on understanding self-care and personal well-being concepts within security and protection mechanisms. Self-care means to be able do things that makes one happy, recharge their energy, and do something fun and not work-related.[6] Personal well-being means to have the right to feel safe and enjoy their full rights in economic, political, social, and cultural aspects, through needed support such as decent salaries/honoraria, health insurance, freedom from false judgments, adequate housing, and equal recognition from the State.[7]

So, how do we (ASEAN queer activists) keep sane, safe, and healthy? We always keep doing TEAM (Together Everyone Achieve More) work! Queer activists, regional organizations, AICHR, and ASEAN State members

5 J. Barry and V. Nainar, *Women Human Rights Defenders: Security Strategies; Insiste, Resiste, Persiste, Existe* (Canada: Don Haris, dDesign Studios), 87–88.
6 Based on responses of Indonesian LBQ women and Transgender man activists when translating Self-Care.
7 Based on responses of Indonesian LBQ women and Transgender man activists when translating Personal Wellbeing.

should come together to engage in developing integrated security and protection mechanisms that include precaution measures and restoration processes, as well as focus on human security to address and prioritize the diverse needs of ASEAN queer activists.

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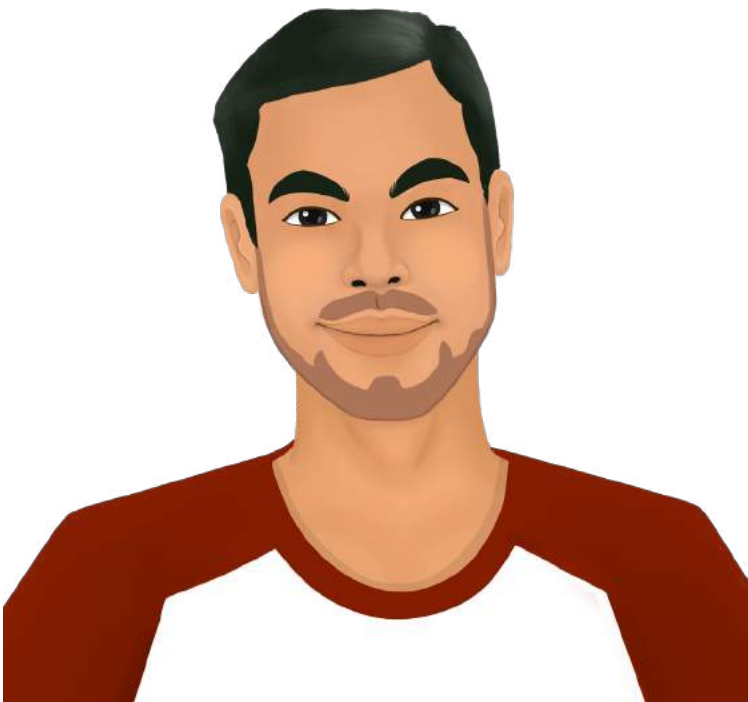
05

Igniting the Transformation of a Queer ASEAN:

Redefining and Owning Regional Agenda and Activism, the Yogyakarta Principles Way

By JOEL MARK BAYSA-BARREDO[1]



"Despite the attempt by a few to render lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons invisible here, we draw strength from the knowledge that we are anything but invisible. In our advocacy, we clearly, publicly, and repeatedly draw attention to the discrimination we face and to our global resistance and activism in the face of adversity."[2]

Since my speech at the UN Commission on Population and Development 47 (CPD 47) in 2014, I've had the privilege of joining numerous regional and global advocacy platforms on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) and human rights. Discourses and rules of engagement have been consistently drawn and controlled by States, which seem to be repulsive against the idea of fully embracing the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersexual, and Asexual (LGBTQIA) peoples. Most, if not all, formal spaces have proven to be tokenistic, outrageously costly, as well as physically and emotionally draining. Despite tremendous efforts, activists navigating these platforms still find themselves invisible, tormented, and excluded from crucial discourses and processes.

Such lived experiences call for an urgent shift towards perspectives and modalities aiming at instilling ownership of processes and outcomes by LGBTQIA peoples, specifically in the ASEAN region wherein issues concerning sexuality is still mainly controversial, contrary to social values, and in many cases, criminalized. In this light, this think piece seeks to offer a regional strategy inspired by the Yogyakarta Principles.[3] This is done by problematizing, redesigning, and reclaiming two ASEAN documents on human rights and development, the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) (2012) and the Declaration on the Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient and Harmonious Society (CoP)(2017).

1 I am grateful to the ASEAN Sogie Caucus for inviting me to contribute to this timely undertaking. I applaud their initiative to engender indigenous wisdom and approaches for the strengthening of SOGIEC activism in the region. I also thank Patricia Miranda, feminist scholar and development specialist, for her guidance and support.

2 Barredo, "Statement for General Discussion: on behalf of the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Caucus."

3 Its formal title is "Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Law in Relation to Issues of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity". This paper shall be using the abridged version.

Imagining, Forging (and Excluding) Discourses, Identities, Values and Structures

Echoing Foucault, discourses are a "way of organizing knowledge that structures the constitution of social (and progressively global) relations through the collective understanding of the discursive logic and the acceptance of the discourse as social fact."[4] As a product of discourse, documents are integral to defining one's identity, privileges, rights and position in society. In order to belong to a particular community or nation, each aspect of one's cycle of life comes with a recorded proof (i.e. birth certificate, National ID, marriage certificate, school diploma, etc.) This also applies to the formation and proliferation of societies and nations. Benedict Anderson asserted that the production and dissemination of literature and other forms of publications such as newspapers offer support for the creation of national identity.[5] Such logic also extends to policies and laws, which informs how a country is governed, and how certain rights and freedoms are enjoyed, as well as how development, peace, order, and harmony are achieved.

Official publications also serve to legitimize the purpose, identity, and agenda of international movements and organizations. Fundamental documents such as the United Nations (UN) Charter[6] and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)[7] set the structure, principles, and positions of member-states, specifically on commitments towards human rights and development. Interestingly, non-state actors contributed to the flourishing of the human rights agenda at the UN level. Sectoral groups and civil society organizations have, despite difficulties, seized opportunities to shape discourses and outcomes of international human rights regimes.[8]

4 Adams, "Michel Foucault: Discourse."

5 Calhoun, "The Importance of Imagined Communities—and Benedict Anderson," 13-14.

6 The United Nations Charter of 1945 not only signaled the establishment of the largest inter-governmental organization, but it also proclaims its fundamental principles and purposes.

7 The UDHR served as foundation for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also paved the way for international rights treaties, which solidify the primacy of state accountability and responsibility.

8 An example is the participation of activists in the passage of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action of 1995. They had the opportunity to impart their expertise, engage in debates with government, and design the document, which is considered, till date, the most progressive blueprint for advancing women's rights.

On the regional front, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) takes it cue from recorded instruments agreed upon by its ten member-states. The Bangkok Declaration of 1967[9] and the ASEAN Charter of 2008 paved the way for ASEAN to shape its values, identity and legitimacy towards a more peaceful, progressive regional community. Human Rights and freedoms are also recognized as part of ASEAN's agenda. This is expressed through the AHRD and the Phnom Penh Declaration on the Adoption of ASEAN Human Rights Declaration in 2012. Sadly, ASEAN's government-centric values and formal ways of working have impeded the full and lived protection of rights in many parts of the region. This not only affects how standards are implemented on the ground, but also forces vulnerable populations, including groups representing them, into silence and exclusion.[10]

In Pursuit of Equality, Engagement, and Empowerment

The previous section shed light on how top-down structures and discourses normalize unequal power relations. These have led to the marginalization of peoples, experiences, and modalities that are perceived to be out of line. Often, those at the bottom are either left almost empty handed or forced to take alternative routes to access their rights. Interestingly, in the case of sexual and gender rights proponents, this condition compelled them to carve their space and ingeniously disrupt the status quo.

The year 2006 witnessed the adoption of the Yogyakarta Principles,[11] which redefined existing human rights standards and obligations based on sexual orientation and gender identity. At that time, a dedicated international instrument recognizing diverse sexual realities and rights was glaringly absent. Furthermore, meaningful opportunities for activists to interact with government and international organizations were also bleak.[12]

The language and structure of the Yogyakarta Principles have strong semblance with existing international human rights standards. It embodies

9 It guides cooperation towards "economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region" and "regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law."
10 Auethavornpipat, "Fixing ASEAN's partnership with civil society."
11 The Yogyakarta Principles, "Principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity."
12 TGEU, "The Yogykarta Principles—How International Human Rights Protect LGBTI People."

the mission to improve the lived conditions of peoples with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities. It features 29 principles, covering a wide range of civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. Each principle is further enriched with its corresponding state obligation/s. In 2017, it was transformed into the Yogyakarta Principles +10 to accommodate emerging themes and challenges, with 111 "additional state obligations," related to areas such as torture, asylum, privacy, health, and the protection of human rights defenders.

Equally groundbreaking is the conditions and process through which the Yogyakarta Principles came into being. The selection of Yogyakarta as host is both symbolic and strategic. It is far from the ivory towers of international diplomacy, and closer to the grassroots. It is located in the heart of Java, Indonesia, a country where sexuality is deemed unorthodox and taboo. Another interesting facet are the people behind the adoption of the principles. The team consisted of experts, academics, judges, UN rapporteurs, and LGBTQIA activists from both the Global North and South.

This undertaking deviated from the traditional approach to the formulation of a human rights instrument. From a critical discourse analysis lens, the Yogyakarta principles was a result of a shift from a "knowledge of," which is designed from a position of power (top-down) to "knowledge for," which accommodates evidence, voices, and wisdom from the ground (bottom-up.)[13] This, thus, requires a great amount of critical understanding of, as well as sensitivity and openness to, diverse truths. The process took its cue from the absence of SOGIESC language in international human rights discourse, the lack of state obligations on their rights and freedoms, and the need to eliminate oppressive practices and systems. Hence, the Yogyakarta Principles serves as a viable solution to challenges represented in existing human rights discourses, as well as lived experiences of LGBTQIA peoples.

Let the Queer Transformation Begin!

Amidst an agenda of "forging ahead" towards a more inclusive and people-oriented community, ASEAN's relationship with progressive civil society and social movements has been limited, calculated, and imbalanced. Spaces for engagement are exclusive only for groups that

13 Colombo, "Who is the other? Epistemic Violence and Discursive Practices," 400-401.

are either sanctioned or accredited by the Association. Furthermore, ASEAN has been turning a blind eye on several lived experiences such as SOGIESC. Issues related to gender and sexuality are often viewed as a matter of socio-economic disruption or even of national security in a number of countries.[14]

Despite efforts towards serious and fastidious acceptance of LGBTQIA rights and freedoms, SOGIESC activists and allies are still excluded from formal regional processes.[15] It is about time for LGBTQIA peoples to step up and redefine structures that have long ostracized and ridiculed their truths. By adopting the Yogyakarta Principles approach, an inclusive and participatory examination, problematization, and redesign of two regional documents could just be the long awaited golden ticket to a queer ASEAN community.

AHRD[16] and CoP[17] intend to enrich ASEAN member states' (AMS) commitments towards human rights and social development. The former, the regional equivalent of the UDHR, contains paragraphs highlighting civil and political rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as the right to peace. It also provides a worldview on human rights and mandates for cooperation. The latter was developed to adopt new ways of thinking and approaches to threats that are and could potentially plague the region.[18] With human rights as one of many guiding principles, it covers six thrusts[19] to promote cultural pluralism, gender equality and empowerment, respect for vulnerable groups, responsible citizenship, and peoples' awareness.

It must be underlined that these documents are non-binding. This means that AMS are not legally obliged to implement them in their respective jurisdictions. However, these may provide opportunities for setting rules and norms on how human rights and freedoms should be accommodated

14 Arrifin, "ASEAN's shifting attitudes towards LGBT rights."
15 Langlois, Wilkinson, Gerber, and Offord, "Community, identity, orientation: sexuality, gender and rights in ASEAN," 700-703.
16 ASEAN, "ASEAN Human Rights Declaration."
17 ASEAN, "ASEAN Declaration on Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Community."
18 Arthakaivalvatee, "Fostering a Culture of Prevention as a Way of Life," 3-4.
19 These six thrusts include: promoting a culture of peace and intercultural understanding, promoting a culture of respect for all, promoting a culture of good governance at all levels, promoting a culture of resilience and care for the environment, promoting a culture of healthy lifestyle, and promoting a culture supporting the values of moderation.

by states and experienced by their peoples.
Both AHRD and CoP lack the language and intent to sincerely tackle SOGIESC related issues. They are governed by a binary, biological approach towards gender. There are no clear provisions pertaining to sexual experiences, identities, and violence. While the AHRD in Paragraph 4, provides for the protection of marginalized groups, CoP completely disregards gender and sexual violence as a root cause of social injustice, conflict, and social discord.

Apparently, based on this brief review, these documents fail to appreciate and address our diverse intersectional challenges and concerns. Their very existence could even strengthen existing systems of oppression in the region. Therefore, a call for an aggressive revolution is imperative. Such undertaking, though, requires willingness and openness to accommodate narratives, collaboration, and diverse opinions. Moreover, spaces for discourse should be safe and empowering. While restructuring and denormalizing discourses take time, strategic cooperation and coordination amongst key actors should immediately take place. SOGIESC organizations are encouraged to educate on regional processes, and create spaces for dialogues and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Legal experts can lend a hand in strengthening language, while academics can help produce and share studies pertaining to gender and sexual experiences. Grassroots movements should assist in mobilizing LGBTQIA individuals and groups to participate in questioning and redesigning regional SOGIESC discourses.

The process and outcomes of the Yogyakarta Principles are proof that the construction and dissemination of knowledge and ability to claim rights should not be left in the hands traditional power holders. This proposed regional revolution has to be taken a step further by shifting from "knowledge of" to "knowledge with," whereby the construction of knowledge is done through an inclusive and participatory manner.[20] Hence, it not only reforms and queers structures and discourses, but also transforms an inclusive and empowering regional SOGIESC community. This new normal will hopefully be our legacy for queer Southeast Asian generations to come.

20 Colombo, "Who is the other? Epistemic Violence and Discursive Practices," 401.

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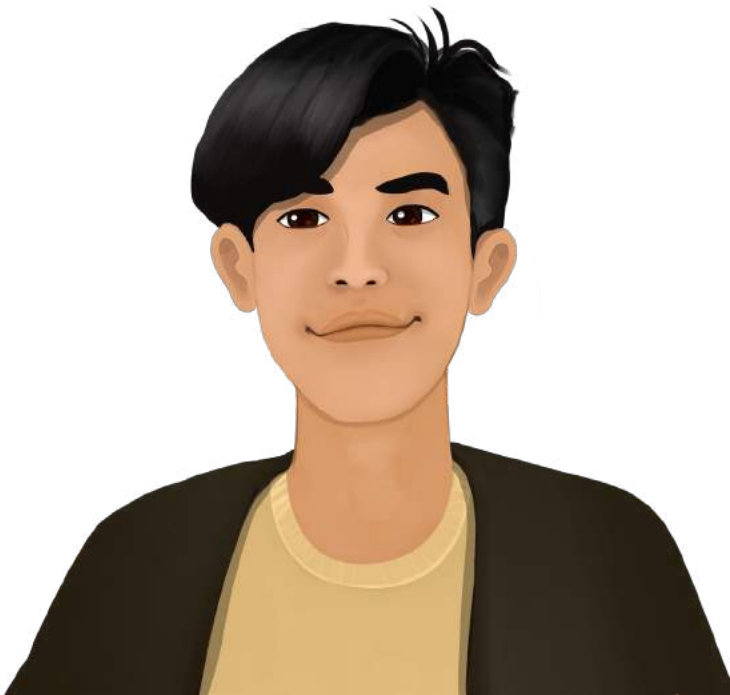
06

Being Gay, Khmer and Buddhist: A Personal Reflection

By METH MONTHARY



The growing visibility of activism in the country has gained some advances in how the government views LGBT people. For example, the Information Minister publicly declared support for LGBT persons and called for measures to monitor and receive complaints on discriminatory media content.[1] The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports actively partnered with local NGOs in developing a "life skills" curriculum that contains LGBT-inclusive information.[2] Despite these, ordinary Cambodians still perceive LGBT people as a new thing, a strange thing. There is still a mindset supporting strict and often binary roles between women and men, and the division of characteristic and personality between women and men.

Cambodia's state religion is Buddhism, but there are also other religions such as Islam that is practiced mostly by the Cham ethnic populations. The practice of Christianity among Cambodians resulted from conversion among those reached by missionary groups from the West. Other religions that believe in the spirits who serve as the guardians of the local community in different areas likewise persist in Cambodia.

For Buddhists, perceptions of LGBT people can vary depending on the type of Buddhism and the ethnicity. Afterall, there is no holy text in Buddhism that clearly condemns one's being LGBT. In the mindset of Buddhism, everyone is encouraged to do well to one another, regardless of color, appearance, gender, or ethnicity. No matter what gender the person is, no matter what color they are, everybody must be treated equally. However, this equality also depends on the customary practices of the area. That is, if the leaders are biased towards a particular belief, or if the community has a certain belief according to the geographical location, the worship or the practice may also be slightly different.

Some Buddhism believers think that an LGBT person's past life is heterosexual. For example, if a person is a gay man, or has a gender expression that is feminine, or self-identifies as a woman, the person's past life is believed to be a woman. If that person is a woman loving a woman, has the same personality as men, or dresses up like men, her past life may be man.

1 Tin Sokhavuth, "Ministry: Stop Mocking LGBT Community," *Khmer* Times, December 15, 2015, http://www.khmertimeskh.com/news/18712/ministry--stop-mocking-lgbt-community/.
2 Igor Kossov and Morn Vannetey, "LGBT bullying endemic, report finds", *The Phnom Penh Post,* December 18, http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/lgbt-bullying-endemic-report-finds.

Due to the influence of Buddhist beliefs in the country, discrimination against LGBT people is not a matter of government policy. In fact, the criminal laws of Cambodia do not prohibit nor criminalize people because of their sexual orientation or gender identity but neither do existing laws provide protection from discrimination. However, discrimination against LGBT people still occurs and happens in the confines of the family, in the household, and in the community. It also occurs in spaces so close to one's lived realities: in schools, workplaces, and healthcare facilities. Discrimination heightens when one's identity is made public. The awareness of gender, especially the basic understanding of SOGIE, in Cambodia is still very low. Even the LGBT people do not understand their own selves in terms of their identities.

This brings me to my personal experience. I was forced to drop out of my academics in the fifth year because the education system and context were discriminatory when I had revealed my identity to the public. I remember how I was verbally mocked and physically threatened almost every day due to the way I dressed and looked, by my fellow students but also by professors and school administrators. They acted like what they did was a normal thing to do.

I was really young and I did not know where to find support. I decided to drop out of school to focus on social work. I had started volunteering in 2017, and I wanted to find out more about myself in order to understand how to protect myself from different forms of violence. My engagement with social work allowed me to know where to find support and how to protect myself from what I experienced. There were times when I would think that it was not a good decision to quit school because even when I wanted to take up a master's degree, I couldn't. But I have come to accept that doing that was important for me to find my safe space for my mental health.

It is my personal belief that when we are born, we are not able to identify their gender and choose their own religion. We cannot even determine our ethnicity, sex, or physical characteristics before birth. How we grow up depends on our personal contexts, mostly influenced by family, religion, ethnicity, context, and country of birth.

I grew up in a Buddhist family in a Buddhist country, and was close to Buddhism from a young age until I grew up. I went through a lot of experiences because of different traditions, contexts, and mindsets. For

me, I understand that every religion is designed to keep the boundaries of humanity. Every religion educates people to do good deeds, but how "good deeds" is defined may be different from one person to another. To me, the image of good deeds is to not hurt a person because of their individuality.

Another teaching that I received from Buddhism is to educate and inspire people to do good deeds, and not to abuse or hurt anyone because of their appearance, color, sexual orientation, or gender identity. This includes not just individuals, but also animals, as well as metaphysical matters that our eyes may not be able to see, e.g., spirits or local guardians. Interestingly, those teachings are not entirely derived from Buddhism. They may have combined with what we have learned about different individuals, societies, and experiences that have happened to us.

Ultimately, it depends on the person what kind of teachings are obtained from Buddhism or the religion they believe in. Thus, Buddhism may potentially play a role in solving the problem of discrimination of LGBT persons, but not entirely. The various forms of discrimination and violence that have arisen against me of my self-recognition as a gay person come from practicing Buddhists. A bigger responsibility is left on the individual. It is up to the person to view Buddhism from the viewpoint of respect or from a viewpoint of hatred.

An in-depth understanding of one's religious background, its roots, its history and its current interpretations is important, regardless if one is an LGBT activist or from other minority groups. That in-depth exploration can be complicated and time-consuming, sometimes requiring learning news concepts, acquiring evidence, respecting the views of religious authorities, or even experiencing a supernatural event. But going within is a key step. In my own personal journey with Buddhism, I've realized the power of my self-agency in determining my moral compass which always points to the direction of respect, non-judgement, and acceptance.

07

Undressing Discrimination: Strategically Integrating SOGIE Nondiscrimination Through Fashion Into ASEAN Identity

By NINAR THANITA WONGPRASERT

> *SOGIESC-based discrimination in 10 Southeast Asian countries has been justified because the agenda and identity of ASEAN community remain "old-fashioned". Comparing the regional reputation in this area, its clothes are so out of date and out of style. This metaphor is important because the "wish list" of the governments is to enhance the quality in multiple aspects of lives of the people in its community—a shadow of global development, but our governments do not yet have the "taste" for it.*

Standing on the ground of cultural activism, this paper argues that fashion that makes a political statement can be utilized as a tool and platform to reduce SOGIESC discrimination within ASEAN community by integrating non-discriminatory values into ASEAN's *One Identity.*

Time to get out of bed and get ready

From a personal LGBTIQ perspective, I'd like to define ASEAN identity as *maladaptive daydreaming.* This happens when one yearns for something far from reality and detaches oneself from confronting or adjusting to real environment. People in power are intentionally staying in a sweet escape—an unachievable daydream. ASEAN is full of visions, most of which are not possible to achieve. This is due to their reluctance—the determination to make real changes at least for once. The approaches contradictably compromise the aimed goals. Nowhere in its documented agenda does it mention LGBTIQ people. It disregards the diversity (one of the selling characteristics of the ASEAN community) of gender, resulting in real and disturbing discrimination witnessed in the community full of fabulous souls. Consequently, these folks are considered non-conformists, or even criminals in some countries with irrational hate.

The prevailing notion of ASEAN identity needs to be challenged for many reasons. First of all, people hold the power to do it. LGBTIQ folks can problematize our challenges and no one else is going to do it better than us. We need to assist our governments because as the ones who live the experience, we know better. It is our refusal to be led by misleading guidelines, especially in a fight that will take a long, arduous journey. This is NOT about the governments taking side or arguing in a *God-Over-Gay* debate—a one-interest-over-another trap. In fact, there should not be a one-size-fits-all solution, but rather an effort from the position of power to ensure that those with differences can co-exist with dignity. ASEAN governments need a wake-up call to get back to reality to make

a real commitment. Governments need to take us seriously because we are going to fight one way or another and be reminded that people are resilient and flexible and that they should be proud of this change.

Undressing discrimination

Everyone needs to wear clothes. This is why activism through fashion could make a valuable impact and compel changes in both LGBTIQ and ASEAN communities. What we wear says a lot about who we are, what we believe in, and what kind of experience we have. Fashion, defined in this article as a trend of designed clothing and accessories in association with styles,[1] makes a statement, very powerfully, to an arguable extent.

Fashion has a close relation with LGBTIQ communities around the world. So much so that it becomes a stereotypical claim that the fashion industry has been dominated by talented LGBTIQ designers, like Gianni Versace, Alexander McQueen, Marc Jacobs, Yves Saint Lauren, and Tom Ford, to name a few. In ASEAN, Santichai Srisongkram, a Thai fashion designer, designed a clothing line that fosters LGBTIQ acceptance and transforms the customers who are mostly queer.[2] In the context of ASEAN, fashion trends are growing fast in big cities like Bangkok, Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh City, and Manila. ASEAN identity that lacks queerness can be challenged by fashion, especially as a part of ASEAN "modern" culture that interacts and gradually evolves with globalization, popular culture, and capitalist practice. The rest of this write-up will elaborate how the power of fashion can help reduce gender-based discrimination in ASEAN countries whose fashion history is rich in colors, fabrics, and styles.

Fashion promotes values

The promotion of desired values can help tackle the stereotype that leads to discrimination. Fashion is a non-verbal visual literature that introduces the differences to the audience. Because fashion is designed, it comes with an agenda. For instance, when fashion breaks free from the gendered colors on clothing and accessories, i.e., men wearing colors that

1 Collins Dictionary, s.v. "Fashion," https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/fashion.
2 Tibor Krausz, "Thai fashion designer makes animal embroidery cool and fosters LGBT acceptance – 'most of our customers are gay'", *South China Morning Post*, September 14, 2019 https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/fashion-beauty/article/3026870/thai-fashion-designer-makes-animal-embroidery-cool-and.

traditionally 'belong' to women, a new consciousness of gender values is promoted. Viral trends also do a great job in encouraging discussion and addressing ignorance. Another good reason about having fashion as a gender ambassador is that people do not just say it, they actually wear it to demonstrate support of the values. Fashion brings out diversity, which is a missed value in ASEAN's documented narrative. In terms of SOGIESC diversity, cross-dressing has entered contemporary mainstream fashion, particularly among the youth. Local and international celebrities, who have the power to turn what seems peculiar into stylishness, are a driving force behind this fashion trend. At the Oscars Red Carpet 2019, Billy Porter mocked gender stereotype by wearing a tuxedo gown. During the Spring/Summer 2017 collection of Saint Laurent, we saw masculine men wear see-through blouses. Also, Jaden Smith came out to the media as a proud cross-dresser, marking a fashion alert. ASEAN could pick up these values in order to take a leap forward towards gender nondiscrimination.

Fashion (de)politicizes

Fashion is an aesthetic politics. Its nature is boundless and may appear to be apolitical on the outside, but is actually very political within. It is well embedded with agenda. Fashion is an effective platform to send across political, social, and cultural messages by anyone and at any time. Fashion can also impact the economic chain of supply and demand to benefit SOGIESC nondiscrimination. Clothing is political in the sense that it has been used by the state to control society and people. It signifies society, history, politics, and culture. When the Khmer Rouge came into power, the people had to give up their clothes and wore black uniform.[3] The regime saw the association of fashion to freedom, expression, and possession. It acknowledged that people are not only judged by the clothes they wear, but also how they wear them, who tends to wear them, what they are encouraged to wear, and what they are made not to wear. Meanwhile, in this present time, Brunei has a penal code that prohibits cross-dressing which specifically targets transgender individuals.[4] We also need to consider prominently social and religious conservativism in relation to garment-based oppression, i.e., Muslim women having to cover their heads and Catholics policing skin-revealing outfits.

3 Van Chan Simen, "Back to black fashion stirs memories", The *Phnom Penh Post,* August 31, 2001 https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/back-black-fashion-stirs-memories.
4 "Brunei: New Penal Code Imposes Maiming, Stoning", *Human Right Watch,* April 3, 2019 https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/03/brunei-new-penal-code-imposes-maiming-stoning.

The use of uniforms and the conformity to a dress code are exclusive by their nature, hegemonizing preferred identities. For instance, school uniforms that bar LGBTIQ students from conforming to their identities are used as tools to discriminate persons with diverse gender identities from attending classes, taking examinations, or graduating. This leads to other long-term issues faced by LGBTIQ communities across the region, i.e., access to employment and increased risks of homelessness, to a further extent. Fashion has the power to challenge, or even rebel against, the political agenda by liberating people with diverse SOGIESC where diversity and inclusion are celebrated through garments. Fashion can react to social problems; it honors the minority groups by reducing discrimination. An example of this is the fashion of shorter skirts. Shorter skirts have proved to liberate women in the 20th century and put an end to the Victorian era because the long tight skirts that women were encouraged to wear disabled them from doing things that men could.[5]

Fashion symbolizes identity and expression

Gender and fashion are in a relationship. The gender binary of masculinity and femininity (or both, simultaneously) is expressed by fashion that builds and holds together a community. Fashion protects the people without them knowing each other personally. It represents identities and boosts the confidence of the collective LGBTIQ community. People come out of the closet, through the clothes they wear, because the environment is safe. The community feels proud and active with their strong identity and fashion is the channel to do so. LGBTIQ persons are less like victims and eventually discrimination can be reduced. It is also another way to empower local LGBTIQ designers whose products attract the sexually diverse groups. Mainstream fashion may not fit certain gender groups in terms of styles and size. Moreover, fashion trends can blur the masculinity and femininity line that restrains personal freedom and strengthens the dominant gender discourse. Fashion can have no gender by being gender-neutral (unisex) or inclusive.

5 Lauren Vecchio, "Liberation Through Fashion", *Anje Clothing,* March 20, 2018 https://www.anjeclothing.com/blogs/newsletter/liberation-through-fashion.

Fashion makes powerful influence on culture

Fashion undoubtedly has cultural impact. It remains inseparable from popular culture and the development of information technology. Fashion grows in parallel with globalization, both are unstoppable and go beyond our imagination. It is powerful to raise awareness and self-consciousness, create conflicts and foster discussions, and challenge beliefs. Influenced by others, peer pressures and the society, fashion is a tool of self- and group expression, suiting certain values and traits.[6] Fashion can be an indicator of whether or not one conforms to the expectation and to what extent they are open to change. Fashion can use its cultural influence to achieve gender nondiscrimination with the concept of gender neutrality or fluidity. Gendering the clothes imprisons people in the social confinement.[7] Unisex clothing where anyone in the SOGIESC spectrum can look for clothes in the exact same department for the exact same product is believed to be practically inclusive and non-discriminatory.

Fashion is strategic

Fashion is a creative art. It constantly changes to remain new and up to date. Creativity with no boundary allows strategy to be designed. Fashion can experiment on anything that comes to its mind and being. The universal values can be embraced with local diversity. ASEAN can build its regional branding (consensus) with local national brands (non-interference). The concept of this fashion collection could use traditional materials, i.e. patterned silk, to create new styles of clothing, i.e., gender-neutral costumes. It is a way to conserve the tradition while keeping changing. This not only helps achieve the goal to become innovatively unique and integrative to the global cultural community, but also groundbreakingly fosters the tolerance for sexual diversity.

6 Nithyaprakash Venkatasamy, "Fashion Trends and Their Impact On the Society", International Conference on Textiles, Apparels and Fashion 2015, September 2015. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282571020_Fashion_trends_and_their_impact_on_the_society
7 Olivia Petter, "Is Gender-Neutral Clothing The Future Of Fashion?", *Independent*, October 26, 2017. https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/gender-neutral-clothing-fashion-future-male-female-women-wildfang-hm-a8017446.html.

Conclusion

This paper introduces fashion as another underestimated tool to practically help reduce the discrimination with five key arguments. Firstly, fashion can set its agenda to promote values that address stereotype that underlines discrimination and foster the practice of tolerance. Secondly, fashion can reflect on politics, society, culture, and economy. What people wear has been a means of the state to control and restrain them. Thirdly, fashion symbolizes identities and expression, which empower LGBTIQ individuals into a strong and active community. Fourth, fashion makes powerful influence on culture. It can raise awareness and challenge traditional beliefs. Lastly, fashion comes with creative strategy because it has no boundaries.

Street fashion used as a site for gender and political expression, filling the movement with colors, patterns and queer aesthetics. (Photo Credit: Ninar Thanita Wongprasert)

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08

Considering ASEAN's Future in the Current LGBT Situation: Portraits and Experiences from Indonesia

By NURDIYANSAH DALIDJO

Democracy in Indonesia is facing a crisis. This also has an impact on increasing stigma, discrimination, and acts of violence against LGBT people. As part of a political minority group, LGBT communities are targets for scapegoating of various problems. This essay invites us to see this momentum as an opportunity to reflect internally in order to relive our experiences in the past as well as to seek opportunities that could be explored and initiated in the future. The solidarity and political identity of LGBT people will continue to be challenged to be able to strengthen the movement, while political work may need to start from the grassroots level. The situation and lessons learned from Indonesia give us reflection in imagining a movement at a wider level in the region with all the complex and unique issues related to LGBT and other things that are intertwined, considering Indonesia as part of the Southeast Asian mosaic.

The middle of 2014 saw a historic milestone moment for the LGBT[1] movement in Indonesia. For the first time, LGBT groups openly expressed political support for presidential candidates – Joko Widodo (Jokowi) as the presidential and Jusuf Kalla as vice presidential candidates in the Indonesian 2014 Presidential Election. The reason given by the LGBT groups at that time was the hope that their success may lead to greater equality and equity for LGBT people.[2] Previously, when Jokowi was the Mayor of Solo and the Governor of DKI Jakarta, he often held dialogues with the *waria*[3] groups and allocated a small budget for health programs[4] for *waria* communities.

"Jokowi's vision and mission provided a new hope. We considered him representing all communities, including our minority friends (LGBT people)," said Jane Maryam who joined the 2014 campaign for Jokowi. We – as

1 The article utilizes the acronym LGBT, reflecting common practice in Indonesia rather than the global use of LGBTIQ.

2 Achmad Faizal, "Dukung Jokowi-JK, Kaum Gay Harapkan Persamaan Hak," Kompas.com, June 25, 2014, https://regional.kompas.com/read/2014/06/25/2100450/Dukung.Jokowi-JK.Kaum.Gay.Harapkan.Persamaan.Hak

3 Benjamin Daniel Hegarty in *Becoming Incomplete: The Transgender Body and National Modernity in New Order Indonesia (1967–1998)* (Australia: Australian National University, 2017) defines *waria* as "Indonesian term which refer to diverse forms of gendered embodiment and social practices. *Waria* practice a broad range of femininities depending on their audience, and challenge the universality of Western categories of gender and sexual diversity."

4 Guruh Dwi Riyanto, "Mayoritas LGBT Dukung Jokowi-JK," KBR, June 21, 2014, https://kbr.id/berita/06-2014/mayoritas_lgbt_dukung_jokowi_jk/4574.html.

queer people – were once in the same group to give a rainbow of color to the diversity of political campaigns through cultural marches in Jakarta, Indonesia. As a transgender woman, it was her first time getting involved in an election. "In the past, transgender people could not vote because we had no ID card. Then, Jokowi's team facilitated and encouraged it. That's something new and different."

Jokowi won the election. In 2014, he was the first president who was not from the political elite and/or a military background. However, the expectations of the LGBT groups were not realized. The political situation had changed. Conservatism grew. The scapegoating of LGBT groups and hate speech by politicians increased. On the other hand, the political campaign in the 2014 election has also had an impact on the strengthening of populism and oligarchy. Stigma, discrimination, and violence against LGBT people had become stronger, more commonplace, and more uncontrolled.

The event that seized the attention of the media and public was the raid of the Atlantis Gym & Spa in Jakarta that led to the arrest of 141 men (including staff members and foreigner clients) by the police on May 21, 2017. Two days later, a gay couple was sentenced to 83 lashes in Aceh following their arrest, after their home was raided by a vigilante group. Arus Pelangi, an LGBT rights NGO based in Jakarta, noted that during January–March 2016, there were at least 142 cases of arrest, assault, discrimination, expulsion, and expressions of hatred towards LGBT people. Meanwhile, the New York Southeast Asia Network reported that more than 300 people in Indonesia were arrested in 2017 for LGBT-related behavior.[5]

Homosexuality is not illegal in Indonesia. However, political decentralization has allowed provincial and local governments to enact their own local regulations. Homosexuality and "cross-dressing" are prohibited in Aceh (as part of their interpretation of Sharia law). Provincial law against homosexual sex acts is also used to criminalize members of the LGBT communities in South Sumatra. Since 2018, the challenge has been multiplied intensely by efforts to criminalize LGBT people through the revision of the Criminal Code to include the criminalization of homosexuality.

5 Nurdiyansah Dalidjo, "Scapegoats in an election cycle LGBTQI in Indonesia," *Overland*, May 22, 2018, https://overland.org.au/2018/05/scapegoats-in-an-election-cycle-lgbtqi-in-indonesia/.

Speaking to the BBC, Jokowi stated that the police must protect threatened minorities.[6] "There should be no discrimination against anyone," he said. Unfortunately, Jokowi never spoke to the Indonesian national media or the Indonesian public with a clear response to the worsening situation for LGBT communities.

"He (Jokowi) preferred to be safe, so he seemed to agree with what happened," commented Jane Maryam. "(I feel) disappointed by his ignorance of violence against minorities."

Jane Maryam said she had lost hope by the time Jokowi ran for the second period as president. Although she and many LGBT people declared to *golput* (be abstaining voters), Jokowi won against the same rival and got re-elected.

The LGBT Modern Movement in Indonesia

Indonesia is facing serious challenges related to the LGBT situation. I do not want to describe the situation as a deterioration as it would undermine the work achieved by LGBT activists so far. Instead, we consider the increasingly hostile situation for LGBT communities in Indonesia as part of larger processes we can see globally. We have seen the growth worldwide of the populism, democratic liberalization, globalization, waves of conservatism, religious fundamentalism, and others.

Indonesia has had a long running LGBT movement. Referring to the archives compiled by Queer Indonesia Archive (QIA)[7], in 1969 – the same year when protests related to the Stonewall riots broke out in the United States and opened a new chapter of LGBT liberation movement – a special organization for transwomen was formed in Jakarta, namely Himpunan Wadam Djakarta (HIWAD). The birth of the organization was facilitated by a government official Governor Ali Sadikin. At that time, the terms "gay" and "lesbian" were not even introduced in Indonesia. This organization would be the first of many organizations formed throughout the '60s, '70s, and '80s.

6 Yalda Hakim, "Presiden Jokowi: Polisi harus melindungi kaum LGBT dan minoritas lain," *BBC News Indonesia*, October 19, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia/2016/10/161019_indonesia_wwc_jokowi_lgbt.

7 Team Queer Indonesia Archive, *Queer Indonesia Archive*, https://www.qiarchive.org

After that, PERWAKOS (Persatuan Waria Kota Surabaya) was established on November 13, 1978 with the aim of protecting *waria* from raids conducted by municipal police. Until now, PERWAKOS is still active and has become the oldest ongoing transwoman organization in Indonesia. By the early '80s, there was increasing connection with the international gay and lesbian movement which was reflected by the increasing use of the terms "*gay*" (gay) and "*lesbi*" (lesbian) throughout Indonesia. Lambda Indonesia was Indonesia's first gay organization which was founded on March 1, 1982 in Solo, Central Java and followed by Sappho, an organization specifically for lesbians which was formed in 1984 in Jakarta. After that, hundreds of LGBT organizations have grown and developed in Indonesia. In 1987, Kelompok Kerja Lesbian dan Gay Nusantara was founded by gay and lesbian activists (most famously Dede Oetomo) which would eventually come to be known as GAYa Nusantara (GN) – one of the longest running LGBT organizations in Indonesia. Its existence has inspired the presence of many LGBT organizations and collectives throughout Indonesia, especially for gay men. From the 1980s–2000s, their magazine was distributed nationally and included local stories, local news, cultural history international news and politics as well extensive personal sections. They were also very active in the LGBT movement in Southeast Asia and Asia in general.

So, speaking of the current LGBT situation in Asia, I think it is certainly important to include the challenging situation that is being faced in Indonesia and other similar countries. Then, we ask how do we relate it to the ASEAN context.

LGBT and ASEAN's Problems

Of course, long before ASEAN was formed in 1967, LGBT identities have been part of the daily lives of each of its member country. When in many Western countries, including the United States, LGBT behavior was once considered a deviation and criminal, the same thing has not been applied yet to most countries that are now ASEAN members. There is an excuse to say that it does not mean that countries in Southeast Asia have recognized or legalized LGBT rights. That may be true. But what if we posit that in the beginning, the recognition or legality at that time was not really necessary because we actually never considered it as a deviation or a criminal act according to laws both written and unwritten? The idea that homosexuality is something not normal or illegal precisely originated in the Western world which strengthened in the 19th century

and was carried to Asia through the colonization and is part of its ongoing legacy, especially in former British colonies, such as Singapore and Malaysia. So can we say that the origin of the anti-LGBT movement was actually part of the "Western colonialist agenda?" It is ironic, then, because many conservatives in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, that is, predominantly Muslim nations, reject support for LGBT on the grounds of it being "Western."

The debate over "LGBT" as a foreign terminology is unnecessary – it is a strategic tool to link it to our global struggle and enact international solidarity. However, we cannot ignore that the term often makes LGBT groups excluded and considered as a discourse or movement that comes from outside: foreign, inorganic, and not genuine. As a region we, LGBT activists in Southeast Asia, seem to neglect that the resistance to oppression or discrimination against political minority groups is part of our history and identity connecting us to the context of the struggle against colonialism or continuing into our time as countries that have liberated ourselves from colonialism.

We face the social reality that LGBT history and communities – with various names according to local contexts in many regions or cultures – are genuine parts of the community itself. The hybridity has contributed not only such connections to an LGBT movement at the regional and global level, but to what should be seen as something enriching. Morevover, it also contributes to the efforts to eradicate stigma and discrimination against certain group of people.

The situation has changed. The situation must change. We need to firmly say that LGBT rights are part of human rights and that the LGBT liberation movement also contributes greatly to better social change for human development in general. The current condition where ASEAN is silent and/or neglects or does not agree to recognize LGBT rights as human rights and protect ASEAN LGBT communities asks us to ponder something: how do we want to define the solidarity and the goals and benefits contained in the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) itself?

Solidarity and Political Identity of LGBT

The term "LGBT" is no longer seen separately as only a sexual orientation or the values or practices of the LGBT groups, but political identity that is even able to break beyond the geographical boundaries of a society

or country to link it to a collective solidarity: LGBT person as a part of LGBT people anywhere on earth. In the context of the region in Southeast Asia, various LGBT individuals and communities are connected with this identity to emphasize the uniqueness of gender and sexuality variations as "ASEAN LGBT groups" in which there is also other diversity that covers their other identities, including ethnic groups or Indigenous Peoples, language, religion, race, political ideology, people with disability, etc.

And we cannot deny that cultural genocide or destruction of LGBT people (systemic discrimination, stigma, violence, criminalization, persecution, etc.) are also part of LGBT people as Indonesians, Malaysians, Filipinos, and probably other people in Southeast Asia. It happened at the same time as the strengthening of the claws of colonialism, imperialism, feudalism, capitalism, racism, militarism, and monotheism brought by our colonizers. The history of oppression and the struggle of ASEAN countries to declare their independence from colonialism (equality and equity) should include the history of the oppression of LGBT people, too.

So, although many of us are inspired by a series of events, ideas, and actions from the Western world, the LGBT movement in Southeast Asia cannot simply refer (and take for granted) to the West – a discourse which tends to be dominant in the interests of the urban middle class. We have our own histories, colonialism, and our immense cultural diversity (including our own Indigenous Peoples) – things that are uniquely part of our collective experience and are essential for us to conceptualize. This very thing can indeed injure our movement later when many politicians utilize this ahistorical approach to exclude LGBT, including same sex/gender marriage, as something that does not reflect our Southeast Asian culture – without seeing it as a form of equality before the law. For this reason, we have challenges in the matter of articulation and narrative that we are trying to contextualize here. Just like the umbrella term of "LGBT" itself which is not from our language. But it strengthens and connects our identities and informs our solidarity that will break those barriers, including the geographical boundaries of the countries. The LGBT liberation movement in Southeast Asia is connected through the cultural and historical hybridity amongst the countries of Southeast Asia.

Then, when we talk about diversity and respect for diversity – like Indonesia as an archipelago nation consisting of 18 thousand islands and more than 300 languages makes "*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*" (unity in diversity) as a national motto – what about sexuality and gender diversity? We don't

want to emphasize tolerance for differences as a marketing jargon in tourism promotion only!

Although we are united into a range of economic, political, and cultural power in the region, each ASEAN country has its own uniqueness. Interventions of fellow members for the country's domestic affairs are still an obstacle to emphasizing that every country in the region also has a specific problem related to LGBT. But just like the ASEAN community that is building a shared identity (imagined community) – "One Vision, One Identity, One Community" – then the same thing is also being done by LGBT communities in the region as "ASEAN LGBT" groups who are part of the ASEAN community.

Lately, especially during the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic that is ongoing and affecting the economic situation of people, acts of violence against LGBT communities, esp. *waria*, have become increasingly blunt in big cities in Java and Sumatra in Indonesia. In early April, a *waria* named Mira (42 years old) was beaten and burned alive by a group of men in North Jakarta[8]; in May, a male YouTuber made a prank video showing himself giving packages of bricks and rubbish which he claimed was basic essentials and foods to *waria* on the streets of Bandung[9]; and in July, a salon worker named Alin was stabbed in her place of work.[10]

"The condition of *waria* in Indonesia is still concerning because of the weakness of transgender organizations. Empowerment for *waria* is also still minimal because there are many who stigmatize *waria* as sex workers and street performers," said Denok from PERWAKOS. She explained that the ignorance of government on *waria* has created the absence of economic empowerment for transgender people. The same thing may happen in the context of the Southeast Asian region with the ignorance of association at the regional level.

8 Adi Briantika, "Kesaksian Rekan Transpuan Mira yang Dibakar di Cilincing," *tirto.id,* April 7, 2020, https://tirto.id/kesaksian-rekan-transpuan-mira-yang-dibakar-di-cilincing-eLzr accessed on July 28, 2020.
9 Kurnia sari Aziza, "Aksi YouTuber Ferdian Paleka Kasih Sembako Sampah ke Waria Tua Kecaman," *Kompas.com*, May 4, 2020, https://www.kompas.com/hype/read/2020/05/04/060143666/aksi-youtuber-ferdian-paleka-prank-kasih-sembako-sampah-ke-waria-tuai?page=all.
10 Siti Parhani, "Jaminan Kesehatan Minim bagi Korban Kejahatan dan Kekerasan Seksual," *Magdalene.co,* July 16, 2020, https://magdalene.co/story/jaminan-kesehatan-minim-bagi-korban-kejahatan-dan-kekerasan-seksual.

However, good news from Indonesia just came from Sikka, East Nusa Tenggara, an island that is far from the economic epicenter of Indonesia and is still dominated by traditional community structures and cultural forms (Indigenous Peoples). A *waria* there made history by being an outspoken and unapologetic transgender public official for the first time in Indonesia. She is Hendrika Mayora Victory or better known as Bunda Mayora (Mother Mayora). In March 2020, she was elected as a member of the *Badan Permusyawaratan Desa* (Village Consultative Agency), an institution in Indonesia that has a function like the House of Representatives at the village government level.

In the village, Bunda Mayora is a well-known figure who actively serves the community, especially women and children. She is close to the church and women's organizations and groups in the village. As a candidate that fought for a position, she had to beat six men. She finally won getting the most votes from the women's groups. Interestingly, Bunda Mayora's story is considered normal in her community, but it is highly appreciated in Java where the LGBT situation is getting worse.

Recently, queer groups on behalf of QLC (a safe space for queer people) in Jakarta, Bali, Yogyakarta, Semarang, Bekasi, etc. raised solidarity in the form of fundraising and popular campaigns dedicated to transgender groups in Indonesia affected by the Covid-19 crisis called #BantuanuntukWaria (Aid for Transwomen).[11] The community-led initiative is also built to involve transwomen as part of the team. In Indonesia, the campaign was very successful and the team was able to raise more than IDR177 million in cash (excluding donations of goods and foodstuff) and attract the attention of dozens of national media to empathize and create news coverage with positive content.

The LGBT situation in Indonesia – and elsewhere – is a portrait of humanity. What has happened and is happening in Indonesia is also a lesson learned that needs to be acknowledged as a part of a puzzle in the LGBT movement in the region. We need to keep strengthening, and learning from, each other to assert unity as an ASEAN LGBT community where the condition of LGBT groups are also an indicator in understanding

11 Julia Winterflood, "'Please, don't underestimate us': Community-led initiatives are helping Indonesian transwomen survive Covid-19," Coconuts.co, May 5, 2020, https://coconuts.co/jakarta/features/please-dont-underestimate-us-community-led-initiatives-are-helping-indonesian-transwomen-survive-covid-19/.

the extent to which we are close to a shared vision of ASEAN to form a community that is "outward-looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity." The challenging situation faced by LGBT groups in Indonesia and other countries in ASEAN today is a benchmark for us to imagine the future of ASEAN.

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09

Painted Shadows: A Queer Haunting of the National Gallery

By NG YI-SHENG

Since November 2016, I've been leading queer tours of Singapore's National Gallery. I dress up in a tight white schoolboy uniform and walk backwards through the colossal chambers of the old colonial buildings, pointing out works by queer artists — Look, here's the ejaculating foam fountain, *Cloud Canyons* (1964-) by David Medalla from the Philippines! Here's the go-go boy's pole and video documentation from *Exotic 101* (1997) by Michael Shaowanasai from Thailand! — while guests giggle in delight, and security guards and passersby stare in confusion, all wondering how such topics can be allowed to be broadcast out loud in our conservative, censor-happy city-state.

The act feels particularly transgressive because of how institutional the gallery is. It's a government megaproject, ten years and S$532 million in the making. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong went so far as to compare the gallery to famed museums in the "great cities of the world" — the Louvre in Paris, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Tokyo National Museum in Tokyo — expressing his wish that it might transform Singapore into a place "with a sense of history and identity." [1]

I first got the idea for the tour on a date night, wandering through the newly opened gallery with my boyfriend. I was ooh-ing and aah-ing at the paintings — yet I also expressed indignation that the labels were leaving out all the juiciest biographical details about the artists, monologuing about their romances, sex lives, and scandals. As for my boyfriend, he hated the experience. The huge, intimidating chambers; the barriers and do-not-touch signs, the inescapable security guards cautioning us when we got too close, hushing me when I spoke too loudly, too excitedly — it all felt cold, unfriendly, oppressive.

Could there be a way, I wondered, to take over the museum ourselves, to make it our own? Thus, the tour — or, to be fancier, the *mobile lecture performance* — was born. I got a commission from the Substation's *School of Uncommon Knowledge* and started researching the artists represented in the collection, imagining a narrative path through the museum that could tell some kind of story of queer art in the region.

One early decision I made was to engage with the history of the buildings themselves. The gallery has made much of the fact that it's housed in the

1 "PM Lee Hsien Loong at the Opening Celebrations of the National Gallery Singapore," Prime Minister's Office Singapore, last modified November 23, 2015, https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/pm-lee-hsien-loong-opening-celebrations-national-gallery-singapore.

former City Hall and Supreme Court: they've carefully restored one of the courtrooms and two of the holding cells, all of which serve as excellent fodder for Instagrammers. I realized I needed to jolt my visitors out of the mystique of colonial antiquity, reminding them of the inherent violence of these colonial institutions.

I therefore command my tour participants to assemble at the holding cells, and open with the following words:

"There is blood beneath our feet.

We are standing in a hall of justice, built by colonial overlords, on the backs of conquered subjects who spanned one third of the world.

It is here that the laws of the British Empire first laid their grip on us. Laws written by men who were horrified by sex, horrified by women, horrified by carnal intimacy between men. Horrified by the courage of those who muddy the lines between gender, race, and class."

I reveal that we actually know the names of men who were charged for the crime of sodomy in the 1800s. We also know their sentences: imprisonment with hard labor, even death.[2] They were charged in the earliest colonial courthouses: buildings in the immediate neighborhood that have now been turned into cultural institutions, such as the Arts House and Asian Civilisations Museum. Later, I address the fact that Singapore's current sodomy law, Section 377A, was set up in 1938—while the very bricks of the Supreme Court were being laid. I describe the case of a British police officer, Captain D. Marr, charged with this law in 1941, revealing how the very district around us was once notorious for male sex workers.[3]

But, as I noted earlier, the gallery isn't just a repository for Singaporean heritage. The website boasts that it aims to showcase "the art and soul of Southeast Asia" through "the world's largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian modern art".[4] This isn't a new idea—our government's been working on positioning our city as a center for

2 Numerous examples exist, sourced from the online archive of *NewspaperSG*. https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/ . Examples include Tan Ah Low, charged with intent to commit sodomy, in "POLICE REPORTS", *The Straits Times,* April 9, 1859, 3. Also Chin Ah Leng, charged with sodomy, found guilty and sentenced to death. "News of the fortnight", *Straits Times Overland Journal,* April 26, 1870, 4.3

3 "Officer of Military Police Charged", The Straits Times, April 16, 1942, 12. https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19410416-1.2.89.

Southeast Asian visual art since at least 1976.[5] Still, it is problematic. Few Singaporeans would describe their cultural identity as "Southeast Asian." How, then, is it possible for us to authentically represent Southeast Asia?

As a kid of the 80s and 90s, I was taught that Singapore's heritage was drawn from the ancestral Asian homelands of our three major racial groups — China for the Chinese, Malaysia for the Malays and India for the Indians. We were encouraged to learn from developed nations like Japan and felt a certain affinity for our fellow Asian Tigers: Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. Most of the nations of Southeast Asia, however, were to be pitied: the genocide in Cambodia, the military dictatorship of Myanmar, and the racial riots of Indonesia were cautionary tales of what might happen if we abandoned our political, economic, and social regimes. We might enjoy getaways to Thailand and benefit from monetary union with Brunei, but these nations were fundamentally foreign, more exotic than any country in North America or Western Europe.

In the National Gallery, however, there's an opportunity to render the foreign familiar. Artists of different nationalities are juxtaposed to reveal shared themes: works by the Indonesian Raden Saleh and the Filipino Juan Luna gaze at one another, bound together by the artists' common history as 19th century Southeast Asian artists working in Europe, using the Western technique of oil painting.

I'm therefore able to weave together tales of queer artists in disparate regions of Southeast Asia, showing that what we think of national events fit into regional trends. For instance, in 1938, the same year as the creation of Section 377A in Singapore and British Malaya, there was a mass arrest of gay men in the Dutch East Indies —including the Bali-based expatriate artist Walter Spies, whose life is well illustrated by the dramatic and bloody 1929 painting *Balinese Legend.*

Certain works provide the opportunity to reveal the intersections of political history, art history and queer history. Take, for instance, *Washing Cloths by the River*, a 1960s painting by Malaysian artist Patrick Ng Kah Onn. The canvas is filled with the bright colors of batik, reflecting this

4 "The Art and Soul of Southeast Asia," National Gallery Singapore, https://www.nationalgallery.sg/about.
5 "Text of Speech by Mr. Lee Khoon Choy, Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Adviser to the Singapore Arts Council, at the Opening of the National Museum Art Gallery on Saturday, August 21, 1976, at 7:30pm," https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/19760821_0002.pdf.

ethnically Chinese artist's obsession with Malay culture — part of a postcolonial desire in Malaysia to celebrate the fusion of cultures in the newly independent nation. In his 1958 *Self Portrait*, the artist even pictures himself as a Malay woman — a form of nationalism both transracial and transgender![6] Yet that dream of interracial harmony and syncretism would soon be crushed by Malaysia's devastating racial riots of 1969. The artist himself passed away in London in 1989, with the official diagnosis of liver cancer — though rumor has it that the cause was, in fact, AIDS.

The effect is, I've discovered, terribly educational for my audience. When I describe the life and times of Philippine artist Jose Joya next to his abstract painting *Dimension of Fear* (1965), it's often the first time younger Singaporeans get to hear about the ravages of Ferdinand Marcos's dictatorship. Even the curators of the National Gallery, when they finally deigned to participate, told me they'd learned something new. Gossip about which artists are gay tends to stay within the arts community of a single city or country—it takes a unique set of circumstances to bring these tales together under the banner of queer Southeast Asia.

But of course, there are gaps in the narrative. There are no openly transgender artists on display: all I can do is talk about the long pre-colonial history of nonbinary genders in the region as I note the androgyny of figures in Burmese artist Saya Chone's *Royal Family Portrait* (c. 1880-1900). There used to be one openly lesbian artist on show: Vietnam-born, US-based Hanh Thi Pham, with her photo series *Reframing the Family* (1990-91). But that work was on loan from the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and has since been returned. I do what I can to redress the balance: I name other queer women artists of the 90s, such as Roselle Pineda from the Philippines and Nani Kahar from Malaysia; I point out the image of "clitoral stimulation" in Singaporean artist Suzann Victor's *Expense of Spirit in a Waste of Shame* (1994);[7] I remind everyone how she and other straight women supported gay artists during government crackdowns.

Most importantly, I let my audience talk. At times I invite them to do so by handing them documents to read aloud: a poem by Singaporean painter and writer Arthur Yap; an interview with Vietnamese artist Truong Tan

6 Simon Soon, "Fabric and the Fabrication of a Queer Narrative: The Batik Paintings of Patrick Ng Kah Onn," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific,* Issue 38, August 2015, http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue38/soon.html.

7 Suzann Victor and Susie Lingham, *An equation of vulnerability : a certain thereness, being* (Singapore: Contemporary Asian Arts Centre, 2002), 108.

about defying censorship. I let them ask questions and invite them to contribute their expertise. My schoolboy outfit is, in a way, a reflection of the fact that I'm here to learn as much as to instruct; my backwards walk ensures that I maintain eye contact with them at all times. The work has evolved with the input of participants, just as any living work should.

Perhaps the most dramatic change in *Painted Shadows,* however, might be in its level of legitimacy. When I first began trial performances in 2016, security guards stopped me at every turn, asking for my certification as a tour guide. Fortunately, the curators got in touch with the Substation, and gave me a go-ahead with three conditions: 1) I should inform them beforehand whenever I do a tour; 2) I should collect an external guide pass from the guards; 3) I should under no circumstances advertise that the National Gallery was condoning my activities, as they would be unable to justify their actions to a homophobic public. I happily obeyed, only organizing tours through my social media account. But I eventually began to push my luck a little, proposing the event as part of the Singapore Fringe 2018; successfully being featured as part of the Jane's Walk Singapore lineup in 2019.

Then, during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, I was approached by the National Gallery curators themselves to give an online talk to members of their new youth programme, Kolektif. This was a Pride Month event, held on 27 June, the very day of the Pink Dot rally. Though I assumed it was best kept hush-hush, attendees immediately posted information about it on their official Instagram page, and later wrote an article about *Painted Shadows* for the National Gallery's official magazine.[8] It's a tiny, tiny victory: to have a queer performance event acknowledged by a government institution. But it's a reminder that change is indeed possible, even during the darkest of times.

I'd like to close this essay the same way I close my performance: with a call to action. Leaving the final gallery, I remind everyone that queer artists and activists across the region are still fighting, whether it's for equal marriage rights in Thailand, the simple right not to be executed under Syariah law in Brunei, or against Section 377A in Singapore — a struggle I've witnessed in the new Supreme Court Building right next door. I then speak these words:

8 Varsha Sivaram and Mina Choo, "Painted Shadows: Highlights from a Queer Perspective", *Perspectives Magazine,* July 24, 2020, https://www.nationalgallery.sg/magazine/painted-shadows-highlights-from-a-queer-perspective-kolektif.

"History is still being made. We fight so that we may haunt museums of tomorrow.

Let us not forget.

And let us live, so that we may not be forgotten."

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