

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Waria, Worship, and Welfare: Exploring Trans Women's Conditions of Precarity Amidst COVID-19 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract

Due to the widescale impact of 212 Action's anti-blasphemy campaign in 2016, there has been a spike in Islamic moral panic discourse and religiously driven vigilante attacks targeting LGBTQ citizens in Indonesia. Simultaneously, gender nonconforming citizens who have gained social recognition, like a segment of transwomen communities called *waria*, have continued to carve out alternative spaces and subvert anti-LGBTQ discourse. *Waria* activists in Yogyakarta, for instance, created the world's first trans-led Islamic boarding school in 2008. Despite suffering attacks from Front Jihad Islam members in 2016, the school has managed to reopen and even to expand its services further for *waria* communities. In capturing the recent trajectory of activism at the *waria* Islamic boarding school, this article highlights the multifaceted conditions of precarity faced by Muslim *waria* in Yogyakarta in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Presenting ethnographic data from the summer of 2022, this paper argues that since the pandemic, in addition to demanding the right to practice Islam, Muslim *waria* activists have increasingly focused on wellbeing (e.g., food sustainability and emergency shelter) in their rights advocacy in Yogyakarta. Merely perceiving the Islamic boarding school as a site of religious activism diminishes a fundamental aspect of its current grassroots efforts, which is to gain access to basic welfare — a key strategy for the survival of LGBTQ citizens in Yogyakarta and beyond. With greater socioeconomic and psychological uncertainties sparked by COVID-19, human rights for *waria* and what holistic security means for Indonesian LGBTQ citizens, must also be carefully understood through a lens of health, welfare, and wellbeing.

Keywords: Waria; LGBTQ Activism; Indonesia; Social Welfare

Introduction

Across Southeast Asia, forces of globalization, which have brought technological advancement and rapid information circulation since the early 2000s, have facilitated social movements addressing a variety of issues like human rights, gender-sexual equality, and the resurgence of religious piety (Basarudin 2015; Chua 2019; Hasan 2006; Lee 2012; Nisa 2018; Sandy 2014). In Indonesia, a plurality of social activism, which materializes through 'friction' (Tsing 2005) between locally situated knowledge and globally circulated rights-based narratives, has created new spaces of dissent, where discourses of intolerance flourish alongside progressive advocacy (Hefner and Bagir 2021; Menchik 2016). While the nation's democratic opening in 1998 has empowered certain marginalized groups, including Muslim women and Islamist-leaning organizations, to gain sociopolitical recognition (Hasan 2016; Rinaldo 2008), queer and gender nonconforming citizens (who fall outside the normative boundaries of heteronormativity) have continued to exist under precarious conditions. Despite the historic presence of gender pluralist traditions and communities across archipelago and mainland Southeast Asia (Boellstorff 2005; Davies 2007; Jackson and Sullivan 1999; Peletz 2009), pro-LGBTQ human rights advocacy has remained contentious

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in Indonesia due to its perceived incommensurability with contemporary Islamic norms. Today, in Indonesia, through greater access to information, symbols (e.g., queer flags and pride merch), and resources about gender and sexuality, some Muslims and Islamic preachers have also begun increasingly to associate localized forms of gender fluid expressions with the growing circulation of LGBTQ discourses (Allifiansyah 2017; Fadhlina 2021).

This article explores the lived experiences of one of the most culturally significant and politically visible gender nonconforming populations in Indonesia, *waria*,¹ illuminating their grassroots efforts to advocate for basic rights and wellbeing after COVID-19. Emerging as a national category in the 1970s (Boellstorff 2004; Murtagh 2017), *waria* generally refers to individuals assigned male at birth who embody feminine self-presentation or claim to have a female soul. Today, the term *waria* also signals *transpuan*, or transgender women. While it is important to recognize *waria*'s transgender subject position, this article considers ambiguity and fluidity as inherent elements to *waria*'s notion of 'transness.' In their everyday life, *waria*, like other queer populations, sometimes negotiate the spectrum of femininity and masculinity when situating their bodies in different social situations.

In the summer of 2022, I worked closely with *waria* community leaders in Yogyakarta, south-central Java, to gather preliminary data for my long-term doctoral fieldwork in 2023. Despite the short period of this preliminary fieldwork, I drew on Daniel Z. Harris and Patricia Leavy's methodology, 'power sharing,' to provide an adequate space for my interlocutors to participate in knowledge production and guide the preliminary findings presented in this article (Leavy and Harris 2019: 7). As a feminist research method, power sharing allows me to 'balance embodied standpoints...and respect for the dignity of all those affected by...research practice' (Leavy and Harris 2019: 95). Leavy and Harris also noted reflexivity as a guiding ethical principle of feminist research, where in addition to establishing a clear positionality, researchers must develop tools to address 'inequalities and injustices, societal betterment, and agendas opposing sexism, racism, homophobia, and classism' (Leavy and Harris 2019: 102). Echoing 'the personal is political' (Lee 2007), there are various personal and political stakes embedded in this research. Despite my cisgender identification, I experienced various processes of gender negotiations during fieldwork in Yogyakarta due to my androgynous presentation. At the same time, my queer positioning placed me as an insider-outsider (Narayan 1993) to the communities I centred in this project. Therefore, I held a strong commitment not to 'project a version of my own sexuality and sexual politics' onto the preliminary findings (Connell 2018: 130).

This article aims to illuminate how *waria*'s existence and advocacy are inherently political. Not only are they explicit in their expressions of gender nonconformity, but also many of my interlocutors have been involved in *waria* organizations since the mid-1980s and late-1990s. More recently in 2008, Pondok Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah, or locally known as PonPes Al-Fatah, was established in the aftermath of the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake and became the world's first Islamic boarding school for transgender women. Since its establishment, PonPes Al-Fatah has been a site of religious activism among Muslim *waria* in Yogyakarta. In 2016, PonPes Al-Fatah became a source of media frenzy after suffering attacks from members of Front Jihad Islam, a local Yogyakarta Islamist organization. This article investigates the multifaceted conditions of precarity faced by Muslim *waria* in the aftermath of this 2016 attack and the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim was to highlight their constructions of 'welfare' as a strategy to articulate demands for basic human rights in Yogyakarta.

Despite the conceptual relevance of care politics (Ahmed 2014b; Taylor 2008), I utilize welfare as a theoretical framework to portray more effectively what my interlocutors understand as *kesejahteraan* (welfare and prosperity), a condition away from precarity, which they are striving to achieve in Yogyakarta. *Kesejahteraan* is a measure of wellbeing that defines the status of citizen welfare in Indonesia. Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, a government institute that conducts national surveys and publishes annual welfare reports, argued that there are eight welfare indicators (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia 2022). These include population registry (*kependudukan*), health and nutrition (*kesehatan dan gizi*), education (*pendidikan*), employment (*ketenagakerjaan*), consumption patterns (*taraf dan pola konsumsi*), housing and environment (*perumahan dan lingkungan*), poverty (*kemiskinan*), and other social indicators like access to technology. As such, in Indonesia, welfare is not necessarily

¹Consistent with Bahasa Indonesia, *waria* will serve as both plural and singular terms in this article.

expressed in conjunction with the liberal humanitarian rhetoric of care (Ticktin 2011). Nor does it echo Western models of vulnerability, epistemology, and relationality (Browne *et al.* 2021).

Drawing on participant–observation and interview data from my preliminary fieldwork from 2022, this article highlights three cutting-edge welfare initiatives led by *waria* from PonPes Al-Fatah: (1) home farming, (2) the Waria Crisis Center, and (3) alternative job training. I argue that, in the last few years, PonPes Al-Fatah has established new political strategies to advocate for *waria*'s welfare by demanding access to nutritious food, physical–psychological wellness, and financial security. Asserting the rights to perform Islamic worship is no longer the sole priority of PonPes Al-Fatah, with welfare becoming a crucial angle in Muslim *waria*'s demand for equality. Perceiving PonPes Al-Fatah as simply a place for worship diminishes the reality that *waria* possess an immense desire to achieve welfare as key strategy for their survival. Given the recent anti-LGBTQ socio–political climate and COVID-19 uncertainties, *waria*'s articulation of human rights must be understood through a lens of welfare to capture holistically how *waria* understand precarity and, in turn, envision security. I use pseudonyms in this paper, except for the PonPes Al-Fatah leader, Shinta Ratri, who is a renowned and internationally recognized transgender and human rights activist.

Religious Polarization and Representations of Gender Pluralism in Indonesia

The recent propagation of anti-LGBTQ sentiments by Muslims from intersecting backgrounds is part of a larger sociopolitical transformation taking place in Indonesia since 2014. In that year, the presidential election was a site of tension due to the widespread circulation of rights-based discourses of various political entities, including Islamists and LGBTQ citizens. In a 2014 special issue of *Time* magazine, 'The New Face of Indonesian Democracy,' elected President Jokowi was featured on its cover page and described 'as the nation's first head of state untethered from Indonesia's political and military aristocracies' (Beech 2014). The democratic promise, which was symbolized through Jokowi, however, proved to be complex and contradictory in practice. While 'democratic cleavage' was a dominant theme in the 2014 general election (Aspinall and Mietzner 2019), Jokowi's campaign was also marked by sharp religious polarization. This antagonism took a radical turn when Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, an ethnic-Chinese minority and a Christian, was elected as Jokowi's replacement for the governor of Jakarta (Nuryanti 2020; Peterson 2020). Condemning Purnama's use of a Qur'anic verse during his re-election campaign in 2016, a coalition of Islamist organizations launched a series of protests that escalated into the 212 mass demonstration on 2 December 2016 in Jakarta (Fealy 2016; Power 2018).

In addressing the impacts of religious polarization in 2016 and new manifestations of Islamist-leaning politics within Indonesian diverse public realms, scholars contended that the 212 movement had sparked new concerns around religious pluralism (Peterson 2020; Hefner 2021b) and populism (Nuryanti 2020; Fanany *et al.* 2021). Notably, the populism expressed through the 212 public discourse 'does not represent...the whole Muslim public...and is, in fact, exclusionary [as it reflects] the specific views and interests of one part of the Muslim population against other groups that share...different theological and ideological views' (Fanany and Fanany 2020: 246). Even so, the 212 movement has significantly altered the dynamics of cultural pluralism in Indonesia. This is seen by the attempts made by Islamist groups to advocate for and maintain their own status quo, despite their struggle at the electoral level. Moreover, since 2016, morally conservative views on gender and sexuality, such as advocating for early-age marriage and anti-LGBTQ ideologies, have been integrated into the mainstream. Additionally, 212 organizers' promotion of hypermasculinity and heteronormativity has influenced the popularity of male Muslim preachers (Nastiti and Ratri 2018), whose authoritative claims on gender and sexuality influence social attitudes toward gender equality among young Muslims (Qibtiyah 2021).

Using the 212 as a mobilizing platform, some Islamist preachers utilized social media to construct LGBTQ visibility and non-Muslim leaderships as markers of immorality. The heightened moral panic in 2016 led Front Jihad Islam (FJI) vigilantes to attack PonPes Al-Fatah and to demand that the school shut down (Knight 2016). Commenting on LGBTQ visibility and security issues, the leader of PonPes Al-Fatah claimed:

In the last few years, we have applied for funding and reached out to our stakeholders to host digital security training for *waria* communities because we must protect our safety online. Since many

pro-LGBTQ events are publicized digitally, sometimes conservative groups send their members to shut down events and threaten the safety of attendees, like what happened in 2010 during the ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, dan Intersex Association) in Surabaya that got attacked by Islamic organization (*ormas* Islam). Some (*waria*) attended, but God also made logistical difficulties that didn't allow many of us to attend, so we saved ourselves from the attack. (Interview with Shinta Ratri 2022)

Despite the recent proliferation of national-scale, anti-LGBTQ Islamic discourses after 212, scholars studying queer populations in Indonesia (Bennett and Davies 2015; Blackwood 2010; Boellstorff 2005; Davies 2007) have given voice to a rich representation of gender fluidity. The Indonesian case of gender diversity also participates in a broader legacy of gender pluralism in Southeast Asia (Jackson 2000; Kang 2019; Sinnott 2004; Wieringa 2014). In her ethnography, Sharyn Graham Davies (2007) examined the indigenous legacy of gender pluralism among Bugis, South Sulawesi's largest ethnic group, to illuminate the importance of gender in Bugis social organizations. Davies's work also underscores how Bugis communities transcend dichotomous constructions of gender in their lives. Davies claimed that 'gender is of central importance in the organization and practice of Bugis social life,' demonstrating that there are roughly five gender identities recognized in Bugis culture: *makkunrai* (feminine women), *oroane* (masculine man), *calalai* (masculine female), *calabai* (feminine male), and transgender shamans, called *bissu* (Davies 2007: 132).

Detailing a lively *calabai* parade during Independence Day (1999), Davies showed how gender fluidity is not only recognized in Bugis society, but that it also has deep cultural significance. During national celebrations and public rituals, Davies observed a diverse representation of gender-fluid individuals who signaled a 'lack of strict differences between women and men, and the ability of a female-bodied person to take on aspects of a man and vice versa' (Davies 2007: 17). She further added that 'gender is not just about your body or about how you feel; for many Bugis, gender and gender identity are very much about what is performed in public' (Davies 2007: 25). At the same time, gender fluidity has also been contested in Bugis society. This can be viewed through the rise of anti-*bissu* sentiments among certain Muslims in South Sulawesi. *Bissu* denotes 'an individual who embodies the energy of both male and female [and is believed to be] powerful enough to contact the spirit world' (Davies 2007: 86). Mythology around *bissu*'s power and their gender fluidity were sometimes conceived as *mushrik*, an Islamic term referring to individuals who practice idolatry or polytheism. However, a renewed interest in preserving Indonesian *adat* (folk/traditional customs) has allowed '*bissu* practices...to coexist with Islam,' where gender fluidity is officially recognized as part of Bugis culture (Davies 2007: 99).

Beyond examples of gender pluralistic expressions among indigenous ethnic groups, anthropologists have also examined contemporary representations of LGBTQ identities in Indonesia. Exploring queer subject positions, Tom Boellstorff argued that 'dubbing' (a metaphor for contemporary forces of globalization) has generated new categories, such as lesbian and gay, wherein; Western concepts of homosexuality' are placed in 'the Indonesian context' (Boellstorff 2005: 6). However, within the boundaries of Indonesian cultures, LGBTQ advocacy's trajectory has been stymied by Indonesia's regional autonomy. Such independence allows regional authorities to construct social rules about gender and sexuality using predominantly heteronormative diction to exclude gay and *lesbi* positions (Boellstorff 2005: 216). Even so, Indonesia's landscape of pluralism has continued to enable the coexistence between expressions of gender diversity and heteronormative Islamic discourses.

Evelyn Blackwood's ethnography of *tomboi* and *lesbi* in Padang, West Sumatra (2010), illuminated how Muslim female-bodied gender nonconforming citizens engage with globally circulated LGBTQ discourses and subvert heteronormative Islamic norms in the region. Blackwood asserted that *tombois* (masculine partners of *lesbi*) often embody ambiguity in their gender expressions and feel closer to men, which has pushed them to craft strategies when expressing 'their trans-identities in relation to family, community, and lovers' (Blackwood 2010: 3). *Tombois* must carefully negotiate self-presentation in their everyday lives because the dominant Islamic discourse in Padang defines 'strict boundaries between men and women'; this leads some *tombois* to feminize their gender expressions around family and even resort to heterosexual marriage due to familial pressure (Blackwood 2010: 45). Such cultural and religious tensions have led *tomboi* and *lesbi* in Padang to feel ambivalent about participating in LGBTQ activism.

Despite their complex realities, Blackwood's study demonstrates how *tombois* and their *lesbi* partners see themselves as part of 'the global gay ecumene' and how globalization allows 'the circuits of queer knowledge...[to] travel back and forth' between Indonesian and global LGBTQ communities (Blackwood 2010: 5). The leader of PonPes Al-Fatah, Shinta, articulated this sentiment during our discussion about LGBTQ gender identifications. She asserted that she 'feels more comfortable identifying as *waria* in [her] personal life due to the long history of *waria* identities and the recognition of their rights in Indonesia. However, she finds it important also to position herself as '*transpuan* and transgender woman' to bridge her 'advocacy projects and coalition building with global transgender networks like *khawaja sira* and *hijras* in South Asia.' In this sense, the transnational circulation of knowledge about LGBTQ rights and identities, resulting from globalization, has motivated gender nonconforming citizens in Indonesia to build alternative networks of support and to engage carefully with international queer discourses, despite the pressure, coming from the state and Islamic authorities, to conform to heteronormative standards.

The Transformation of Precarious Subjects and *Waria* Advocacy

Precarity, 'the condition of being vulnerable to others' and a 'globally coordinated phenomenon' (Tsing 2015: 20, 205), adopts multiple forms and meanings in today's world. Highlighting the socio-political dimension of precarious lives under the strains of globalization, scholars have described precarity as an existential state 'without an anchor of stability' (Standing 2016: 1), where individuals experience 'a subjective shift from ontological security towards existential anxiety' (Neilson 2015: 184). After neoliberal reforms, political instabilities tied to changing socio-economic relations (Harvey 2007; Hewamanne and Yadav 2022) and state-sponsored violence (Butler 2006; Khosravi 2017; McRobbie 2006) have also deepened systemic inequality. This further constrains minoritized subjects from gaining access to wellness and social mobility. The 2016 Front Jihad Islam has generated new feelings of existential anxiety among Yogyakarta's *waria*, who have found it 'more difficult to earn a living and express themselves.' The leader of PonPes Al-Fatah has asserted that:

After the vigilantes came to attack the school building, we had to temporarily stop our activities out of fear of being physically attacked. For years, we have been a safe haven for transgender communities, but what happened in 2016 made us realize that we must continue advocating for our safe spaces. And after the pandemic, many *waria* can no longer safely earn money on the streets, some *waria* also reported being spat on and facing locals who threw things at them like water bottles. For a while, our community members were nervous to go outside, they're anxious (*cemas*) and scared (*takut*). (Interview with Shinta Ratri 2022)

Shinta's statement has illuminated how, for *waria*, precarity signifies as a sense of deep vulnerability, and how their insecurity is experienced psychologically, socially, and economically. Moreover, the notion of precarity is sometimes constructed by state actors and social welfare institutions through a 'pathologization of vulnerability,' where uncertainty signifies the embodiment of the 'disordering experience' of existential anxiety (Vij 2021: 68). In its visceral and material manifestations, precarity is relational and 'runs through self and self-other relations,' forming 'a sense of unpredictability, dependence on the actions of others, and the finitude of forms of labour and life' (Vij *et al.* 2021: 23). The affective quality of precarious existence, which to an extent is articulated and realized through social relations, can simultaneously be generative; indeed, it has sparked counter-hegemonic activism by structurally marginalized communities like migrant workers (Martin and Prokkola 2017; Schierup and Jorgensen 2016), the urban poor (Goopu 2001), and asylum seekers (Trimikiniotis *et al.* 2016; Waite *et al.* 2015).

In a pluralist nation like Indonesia, uncertainty tied to a precarious existence is influenced by a wide array of socio-economic and cultural factors, as well as broader political transformations (and has been since Indonesia's independence). The significance of religion in governing public life and politics, as a condition of modernity (Casanova 1994; Eickelman and Piscatori 2004), is evident in Indonesia's nation-building project. Still today, religious matters are some of the most crucial elements that drive ongoing debates about citizen-belonging in the country (Hefner 2000). Pancasila, Indonesia's founding principle

and ideology, while universal and pluralistic in its orientation, dictates that the first pillar to Indonesian citizenry is 'the belief in the one and only God' (*ketuhanan yang Maha Esa*), consequently charting the path for boundary-making in the nation (Bagir *et al.* 2020; Formichi 2021). Scholars have pointed out that the state's institutionalization of official categories like *agama* (monotheistic or world religions) and *aliran kebatinan/kepercayaan* (streams, can include indigenous and syncretic practice) significantly impacts religious identity constructions in Indonesia, particularly because it creates a sharp distinction between 'religion' and 'indigenous tradition or culture' (Bagir 2018; Kunkler and Stepan 2013; Lindsey and Pausacker 2016). While a few traditions that support the visibility of queer ritual specialists, such as *bissu*, have some grounds for legitimacy due to being recognized as a cultural heritage (Syam *et al.* 2021), communities like Muslim *waria*, who challenge Islamic gender binary and normative codes, still face tensions in their daily religious practice.

The gradual process of Islamization and the spread of Islamic nationalist discourse throughout the 1970s and 1980s have also intensified precarity among religious minorities (e.g., Hindus and Christians), syncretism practitioners, and those affiliated with non-mainstream Islamic denominations (Atkinson 1983; Geertz 1976; Hefner 1985). In 1998, the post-Suharto democratic transition also carved out new spaces of dissent among Muslims, arenas in which groups like Islamists and advocates of shariatization have strengthened their mass appeal by forming coalitions and proselytizing (Buehler 2016; Sidel 2006). While these examples illuminate a growing public visibility of conservative religious ideologies, the 'conservative turn' in Indonesia (Peletz 2022) remains situated within a broader pluralist landscape (Geertz 1973; Hefner 2021a; Howell 2005) that continues to promote a fruitful coexistence between diverse groups representing different ideologies, authoritative claims, and rights-based discourses. The material existence of the PonPes Al-Fatah establishment is but one of many examples of the generative potential of Indonesian pluralism; it showcases the possibility for non-cisgender Muslim citizens to claim religious and political authority.

Aside from alternative religious views, gender politics is instrumental for nurturing new attitudes around human rights and equality in Indonesia. Rachel Rinaldo's study (2013), which focused on the activism of middle-class Muslim women in Jakarta, highlights their desire to challenge their presumed subordinate position within male-centric political organizations. Rinaldo's interlocutors have argued that, since the first Muslim women's organization was established in 1917, women have actively participated in challenging gender hierarchies in Islamic political parties; they have also introduced a feminist perspective to Islamic equality debates and developed playful, modern ways of embodying piety (See also Bucar 2017; Smith-Hefner 2019). Similarly, Kathryn Robinson's exploration of gender politics in Islamic revivalist movements in Indonesia have illuminated that 'women have been pivotal players in unfolding political scenarios, and [that] gender inequalities and ideologies have been central to sustaining the exercise of...power by a male-dominated elite' (Robinson 2008: 188; See also Ong 1990).

Today, people living in precarity have been defined largely through discourses on sexuality. Mass media explosion in the early 2000s led to the proliferation of legal, religious, and popular discourses addressing issues of pre-marital sex and queer sexuality, which sparked public anxieties, casting youth (Smith-Hefner 2009) and gender nonconforming citizens (Platt *et al.* 2018) as the primary drivers of Indonesia's current moral crisis. The pervasiveness of masculinist state ideologies, which distinguish the moral and national duties of women and men across Southeast Asia (Andaya 2008; Heng and Devan 1995; Williams *et al.* 2012), has created even more precarious conditions for gender nonconforming citizens due to their ambiguous presentation and non-heteronormative life course. Tom Boellstorff contended that the post-Suharto democratic transition marked the emergence of 'political homophobia' (Boellstorff 2004), a new genre of violence and heterosexist cultural logic that targets gay and transgender communities. Tragically, it is claimed that these communities cause societal shame by defying dominant masculinist visions of the nation.

As a legacy of political homophobia, a renewed sense of moral panic has propagated the view that LGBTQ citizens threaten the pre-existing Islamic heteronormative system and even the nation itself (Davies 2016; Rodríguez and Murtagh 2022; Thajib 2022; Wieringa 2022). Responding to Islamist mass mobilizing efforts since 2016 (Arifianto 2020; Lane 2019; Mietzner 2018), those that helped facilitate the dissemination of anti-LGBTQ religious diatribes in Indonesia (Wijaya 2022), *waria* communities have formed alternative spaces and political strategies to challenge stigma and transcend precarity. It is in

this context that Muslim *waria* activists in Yogyakarta began promoting human rights through employing the rhetoric of ‘welfare’ and prioritizing issues like healthcare and food security in their partnerships with NGOs, government officials, and local religious leaders.

The notion of welfare is loaded with varied meanings and is often measured by how government and institutions develop policies to intervene on diverse social, political, and economic issues pertinent in specific historical periods (Adler 2019). Literature on Southeast Asian welfare systems illustrates that, in Indonesia, Islamic organizations play a fundamental role in promoting social welfare, particularly with regard to issues of poverty, environmental justice, and gender equality (Aoki 2015; Hefner 2000; Riyadi *et al.* 2021). In the Special Region of Yogyakarta, social welfare is intimately bound to social life and politics. Yogyakarta rulers have historically showcased a philanthropic commitment and worked closely with the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs to cast a wide network of social welfare organizations across the region (Sugiyanto *et al.* 2021). Hence, despite threats of direct violence and social persecution under Indonesia’s current anti-LGBTQ religious, social, and political climate, Yogyakarta’s *waria* have showcased their deft ability to rely on existing local welfare structures. Demanding welfare has also allowed *waria* to expand their coalition network (Leany and Sari 2022; Martinez 2020) with other precarious populations, including religious minorities, disenfranchised women, and LGBTQ youth, all of whom demand similar goals in their bottom-up advocacy around access and inclusion.

From Bare Soil to Sustenance: Food Insecurity and *Waria* Home Farming

My fieldwork in the hot and rainy summer of 2022 was filled with many surprises and wonders. Having just settled for a few days in Yogyakarta, I had yet to learn my way around the city. ‘You can basically split Yogyakarta in the middle; northern Yogya is where university kids and affluent families live and they’ve got mad expensive coffee. Southern Yogya is where down-to-earth folks and artists hang out, you’ll find a ton of *burjo* in the south,’ said Nur,² one of my queer interlocutors. *Burjo*, slang made up of the words *babur kacang ijo* (Indonesian mung bean porridge), in its general sense, signifies a tiny roadside stall that sells basic food like *Indomie* noodles and fried rice. More specifically, *burjo* is a cultural phenomenon unique to Yogyakarta. Partaking in the *burjo* culture does not merely indicate that one prefers quick meals, or that only lower-income individuals occupy *burjo*. Rather, coming to a *burjo* is a marker of distinction (Bourdieu 1986) between those perceived as ‘living a stuck up life’ and those consuming an ‘authentic,’ slow-paced, common way of life in Yogyakarta.

Anthropologists have long studied food consumption to understand human behaviour and culture (Ayres 2013; Counihan 2018; Farb and Armelagos 1980; Mintz and Du Bois 2002). Beyond capturing its biological and nutritional functions, studying food consumption also provides insights into power relations and how precarity takes shape in a given society. As a growing concern worldwide following the global economic crisis in the mid-2000s, scholars and policymakers alike have developed new strategies for understanding food security, a concept defined as ‘availability, access, and utilization’ (Barrett 2010: 825). Availability of food sources, while necessary, does not automatically denote access. Access to food is also ‘multidimensional’ because it manifests in an uneven manner economically and socio-culturally, primarily because not all foods suit a community’s tastes and needs (Barrett 2010: 825). Utilization, moreover, refers to ‘whether individuals and households make good use of the food to which they have access’ (Barrett 2010: 825). On the one hand, the significance of consuming meals at a *burjo* reflects a widely shared appreciation for affordable and ‘lowkey’ dining experiences in Yogyakarta. On the other hand, the *burjo*’s popularity also illuminates deeper systemic issues like a lack of adequate minimum wage and food insecurity.

Pondok Pesantren (PonPes) Waria Al-Fatah is situated inside a small alley in Kotagede, southern Yogyakarta.³ The school main building resembles a traditional Javanese-style home, and the house was passed down to *Ibu* (ma’am, mother) Shinta, the leader of PonPes Al-Fatah, by her family. Within the complex, there is a small classroom with wooden desks and a table, a few bedrooms for residing individuals, a hair salon, an open veranda, and a medium-sized stage. In the summer of 2022, there were roughly 60 *waria* individuals affiliated with the boarding school. PonPes Al-Fatah also has diverse

²Pseudonym.

³In October 2023, PonPes Al-Fatah moved to a new location in northern Yogyakarta.

constituencies and stakeholders, including Christian *waria*, religious leaders, feminist associations, and LGBTQ organizations. Discussing her current priorities at PonPes Al-Fatah, *Ibu Shinta* claimed that ‘food security has been a big source of anxiety for *waria* communities in Yogyakarta since the COVID-19 pandemic.’ She added that after struggling because of hearing stories about *waria* ‘not eating for days’ and ‘not having any money to buy nutritious basic groceries,’ she reconsidered what, exactly, the PonPes could offer as a service. As one of the most prominent *waria* community leaders in Yogyakarta, *Ibu Shinta* envisioned and implemented multiple strategies to distribute daily sustenance and produce food in the community.

At PonPes Al-Fatah, there are multiple primary strategies for combatting food insecurity; these include communal feasts and the home farming initiative. Every Sunday, PonPes Al-Fatah hosts a Qur’anic recitation circle, followed by an evening prayer and a communal feast. The Qur’anic recitation circle is a regularly occurring activity, inspired by the school’s mission to provide a safe space for *waria* to worship and gain spiritual nurturance (Esch 2015; Safitri 2013; Widyantoro 2019). What struck me so strongly about this weekly event was the fact that while it centres on Islamic spiritual practices (e.g., praying, reading the Qur’an, and listening to sermons delivered by an *ustadz* or *ustadza* [religious teachers]), at the heart of the Qur’anic recitation circle is also the pleasure of eating and ‘being one big family’ through consumption. Scholars have noted the significance of food-sharing and inter-household food exchange as a source of security and community building in Southeast Asia (Cadelina 1982; Cahyani *et al.* 2019; Janowski and Kerlogue 2007). Hosted on the PonPes veranda, Qur’anic recitation attendees are usually greeted with hot beverages, *gorengan* (fritters), sweets, and packaged water. While eating at PonPes Al-Fatah, *waria* and more dominant members of the Indonesian society, such as male *ustadz* and cis-gender neighbors, can blend together and enjoy each other’s company. This breaks down normative assumptions about their socio-religious distinction. Every Sunday at PonPes Al-Fatah, not only can *waria* feed their souls by worshipping alongside their community members and allies, they can also benefit nutritionally from sharing meals.

However, PonPes Al-Fatah’s generosity in providing food fails to address the root of *waria*’s food insecurity: ‘the struggle to purchase *sembako*’ (groceries). To mitigate this problem, *Ibu Shinta* initiated a ‘home farming’ programme as a ‘sustainable solution (*solusi jangka panjang*).’ She claimed:

For many *waria* in Yogyakarta, they could only eat *seadanya* (bare minimum, whatever is around), which does not provide substantial nutrition. Many *waria* don’t even care about what they eat, it makes me sad and not be able to sleep at night. People in the community who cannot afford food do not consider the need to consume *empat sehat lima sempurna* (four healthy five perfect — a nutritional concept, where basic consumption should include carbs, protein, fiber, fruits, and dairy). This especially concerns me because I studied subjects of agriculture during college and have a greater understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet. Additionally, because of a lack of stable income since the pandemic lockdown, many *waria* ended up not being able to purchase any groceries at all. (Interview with Shinta Ratri 2022)

In 2020, when the pandemic was first spreading, ‘PonPes Al-Fatah was able to provide basic groceries to the community, but it eventually began running out of funds to feed the entire community.’ This sparked *Ibu Shinta*’s idea to develop a home farming initiative in 2022, where PonPes Al-Fatah reached out to an organization that specializes in training farmers how to plant crops in non-ideal natural environments. Facilitators from the organization can thus introduce ways for *waria* to utilize non-productive soil like ‘dry or wet beach lands,’ thereby maximizing their capacity to produce food at home. The initiative’s primary goal is ‘for *waria* households to grow basic ingredients, spices, and vegetables on whatever small piece of bare land available in their home.’ Some *waria* communities in Yogyakarta live in alternative homes, together as a nonbiological family, allowing *Ibu Shinta* to mobilize major *waria* households to participate in the programme with the hope of increasing *waria*’s overall access to daily sustenance throughout the city.

By *Ibu Shinta*’s testimonies, it is evident that, since the pandemic, food insecurity has severely impacted *waria*’s ability to exercise their basic human right to ‘the highest attainable standard of health’ (Ayala and Meier 2017: 1). Through the home farming programme, *waria* have stepped out of their

comfort zone to reimagine food distribution and contribute to ‘agricultural change’ (Rosol and Rosol 2022). Despite looming anxieties about unanticipated climate-related issues like drought or running out of funds, *waria* from PonPes Al-Fatah have demonstrated subversive modes (e.g., food sharing, maximizing bare soil, and establishing an inter-household food distribution system) of expanding their basic rights to daily sustenance in times of uncertainty.

Waria Crisis Center: Vulnerable Bodies and New Health Strategies

In 2022, I attended the launch of an elderly care programme at Waria Crisis Center (WCC), a lively event attended by local officials, NGO representatives, academic collaborators, neighbours, religious leaders, and *waria* activists. WCC serves primarily elderly *waria* and is located in Bantul, a location farther away from the city centre and surrounded by green rice fields. Community members at WCC have claimed that ‘the location was chosen because many elderly *waria* want to have a more peaceful life, away from city life.’ Partnering with a feminist organization (VOICE), a mental health counseling provider (ERAT), and an inclusionary social service organization (PKBI DIY), WCC’s elderly care programme offers secular services to vulnerable *waria* populations; such services include emergency shelter, mental health counselling, and healthcare.

WCC is managed by *Ibu Yuli*,⁴ a *waria* activist who served as the director of Trans Empowerment at PonPes Al-Fatah. Described by *Ibu Shinta* as an ‘angel walking this earth’ and a PonPes member as ‘the most nurturing mother,’ *Ibu Yuli* was a grounding presence in the community and had incredible skills in Qur’anic recitation. As WCC’s coordinator, *Ibu Yuli* worked closely with *Ibu Shinta*; their work turned them into some of the most authoritative figures in the Yogyakarta *waria* activist scene. In our interactions, I learned about *Ibu Yuli*’s humanitarian qualities. After discovering that I am native to Aceh, a region hit by a major Tsunami in 2004, *Ibu Yuli* then opened up to me and shared that she had visited Aceh as a Tsunami volunteer, where she stayed in various areas to assist *waria* Tsunami victims. Having done decades of activism, *Ibu Yuli* is a well-respected figure in the community and has a special gift of connecting people from all walks of life.

Because of WCC, *waria* in need can access therapists and get health checkups. Importantly, a significant portion of *waria* affiliated with PonPes Al-Fatah and WCC are elderly needing special attention for their psychological and physical needs. Scholars have reported an increase in vigilante attacks targeting transgender individuals in public spaces since 2016 (Rodriguez 2019; Toomistu 2022), a reality that has created a persistent feeling of vulnerability among *waria*. Such attacks have also manifested in numerous ways within the current anti-LGBTQ climate, including public mockery, direct physical attacks, and hatred spewed on social media. Scholars have argued that transphobia, as a contemporary phenomenon, has intensified psychological distress among transgender individuals (Klemmer *et al.* 2021); transgender women are especially subjected to direct acts of violence (Elliot and Lyons 2017). As an advocate of elderly *waria*’s rights to healthcare and counselling, WCC is a model of how the growing advocacy towards trans elderly care around the world (Cook-Daniels 2016; Ettner *et al.* 2013) is taking shape in Yogyakarta.

In addition to elderly care, WCC also provides emergency shelter for *waria* in unique precarious situations. *Ibu Shinta* claimed that many transgender women in Indonesia are ostracized by their biological family, pushing them to seek emergency support ‘until they can pick themselves back up.’ She also added that some individuals fall into abusive relationships and have had their money stolen by ‘cunning men,’ forcing them into homelessness and facing danger on the streets. During one of the Qur’anic recitation circles at PonPes Al-Fatah, I sat next to *Karla*,⁵ a young *waria* who had just begun living in WCC emergency shelter. *Karla* had rosy make-up applied to her face and had joined the elementary Qur’anic alphabet lesson at PonPes Al-Fatah. Seemingly shy at first, she quickly warmed up to me as we reunited again at WCC. After kindly offering to make me a cup of coffee, *Karla* opened up about her life. She said that she came from Sulawesi, but that her father had banished her from home because of her failure to perform as the ‘first son.’ In Sulawesi, *Karla* claimed that it is customary for fathers to pass inheritance on to

⁴Pseudonym.

⁵Pseudonym.

their firstborn, and she felt deeply saddened by her father's choice to uproot her from properties, which she claimed were her 'birthright.'

When she moved to Yogyakarta, Karla dabbled in sex work and explained that she felt affirmed in her 'beauty' through sexual encounters. However, she admitted that 'men took advantage [of her] and often stole [her] belongings, but [she] could not help but to get back with them despite most of them having real relationships with women.' She thus sought help from WCC after experiencing yet another incident of having her money stolen by a 'boyfriend.' She then whispered to me that she has also secretly sought the help of a *dukun* to 'get her money and man back,' a detail she had kept to herself because she is 'breaking Islamic rules.' (*Dukun* means various things in Indonesia and can refer to indigenous medicinal specialists, as well as someone believed to possess a spiritual power to contact spirits, predict the future, and make something happen [either negative or positive] to a person [Wessing 1996; Woodward 2011]). Curious about her motivations to contact a *dukun*, I asked another question, and she gave me a cheeky smile and said, 'it works *kak* (sis), my boyfriend begged for me to take him back, but the money is still not returned.' Karla's story illuminates the precarity of transgender women who have lost familial support and access to security generally, causing them to remain in toxic relationships to feel some semblance of legitimacy — a dynamic of 'entrapment' commonly identified in cases of domestic violence (Herbert *et al.* 1991; Landenburger 1989). While Karla has been able to gain temporary security through WCC, it is difficult to speculate whether *waria* individuals, whose precarious position is shaped by multiple socio-emotional-psychological factors like Karla, could fully step out of cycles of entrapment without further institutional support or greater societal awareness around *waria*'s experience of gender-related violence.

To assist *waria* dealing with family ostracization and nonetheless still desiring to build relationships with their family, PonPes Al-Fatah also initiated a 'family support' programme. Family support hosts 'fun events' for *waria* and their family, as well as provides mediators to minimize potential harm in *waria*'s attempt to communicate with family members. Alongside WCC, PonPes Al-Fatah has been able to strengthen its welfare advocacy for vulnerable populations, such as elderly *waria* and those dealing with social alienation, thereby illuminating the institution's efforts to expand its original mission to provide religious services. In other words, while *waria* can access PonPes Al-Fatah as a safe space to conduct Islamic worship, precarious *waria* experiencing a multitude of socio-psychological issues can also find non-spiritual means of support; these include therapy, health check-ups, and temporary shelter.

Alternative Job Training: Financial Independence and Personal Dignity

In addition to concerns around food, shelter, and healthcare, the spread of COVID-19 has also created difficulties for *waria* to find sustainable means of income to support themselves holistically in Yogyakarta. In the summer of 2022, *Ibu* Shinta also initiated an educational programme, called 'alternative job training,' through PonPes Al-Fatah to expand *waria*'s capacity for financial independence. *Ibu* Shinta claimed that this programme is crafted specifically for 'younger *waria* who still predominantly rely on [unsustainable jobs] to get by like sex work and busking.' She added that she often feels concerned about the lives of younger *waria*, who 'have not developed enough spiritual awakening and attend regular activities at PonPes Al-Fatah' due to their preoccupations with romantic relationships and being or feeling beautiful. *Ibu* Shinta clarified that she 'does not judge *waria* who choose a path of sex work because [she] is familiar with that world' in her youth. However, as a community leader, she believes that sex work and busking are not '*bermartabat*' (dignified, honorable) and do not provide long-term financial stability. Therefore, her goal with the alternative job training programme was to introduce *waria* to occupations and entrepreneurial strategies that would not only create financial security for them, but also impart societal honour and respect.

It is important to contextualize the expression, *bermartabat*, in *Ibu* Shinta's aforementioned testimony. This word carries a nuance of bias about what constitutes dignity, a notion that adheres to a particular, traditional Indonesian cultural perspective that reflects the honour-shame dichotomy in Indonesia's founding ideas about morality. Affect theorist Sara Ahmed (2014a) argued that the mobilization of emotions, such as pride and shame, in social movements or national politics is significant for cultural constructions of identity, morality, and citizen belonging. In the context of Muslim-majority

societies like Indonesia and Egypt, anthropologists have underscored how the workings of honour–shame culture shapes norms around gender and power; in such contexts, feminized bodies are perceived as sites of honour that need safeguarding, thereby creating myriad pressures for women to embody morality and piety in their daily conduct (Abu-Lughod 1986; Brenner 2011; Rinaldo 2011; Röttger-Rössler 2009). The Islamic ideology around honour, which significantly shapes notions of morality and piety, is an important element of PonPes Al-Fatah’s mission as a trans-led Islamic boarding school. *Ibu Shinta* claimed that ‘the core mission of PonPes Al-Fatah is to transform *waria* into responsible Muslim citizens, who are accountable to their family, society, neighbors, and communities.’ In *Ibu Shinta*’s view, *waria* must eventually transcend their limitations and see themselves beyond societal scripts that place them in the lowest rank of society, which is done through ‘being moral and emphasizing dignity in their occupations.’

In addition to these moral reasonings, the alternative job training programme also aims to spark new interest and creative energy among *waria* to seek out jobs that ‘do not exclusively rely on (*ketergantungan*) men’ or romantic encounters. *Ibu Shinta* claimed that ‘*waria* who do not have sources of income outside the realm of sex often get themselves in personal troubles that force them to overspend beyond their means,’ such as ‘taking care of unemployed boyfriends’ and ‘taking out loans’ they cannot repay. In contrast, alternative jobs introduced to *waria* include ‘make-up artists, masseuse, traditional Javanese dance teachers, bakers, and entrepreneurs.’ PonPes Al-Fatah has planned to contact *waria* entrepreneurs and other collaborators to facilitate trainings. The alternative job programme also hopes to offer a ‘responsible financial management’ course to teach crucial skills like microfinance, opening a bank account, allocating monthly savings, and writing grants — all of which are necessary for *waria*’s financial independence in times of uncertainty.

By immersing myself in the PonPes Al-Fatah community, I learned about *waria* entrepreneurship in the city and met a few *waria* small business owners. Their narratives illustrate the success of *waria* who have been able to achieve financial independence by having sustainable means of income. First, I met Bunga,⁶ who owns a t-shirt business that she co-managed with her siblings. She also worked for another organization that focuses on HIV/AIDS prevention. One day, Bunga invited me to visit her store, which is operated from her home. Riding my motorcycle through Yogyakarta’s streets to visit her, I found myself lost in a steep, narrow alley that led me to a group of older men standing by cages of birds next to a *kali* (walled riverbank). They helped redirect me to Bunga’s home. Upon arrival, I introduced myself to her sisters, who were busy sewing. Her living room was packed with sewing machines, clothing racks displaying her t-shirt collections, and packaging items. As we drank coffee and ate fried *tempe*, Bunga showed me her t-shirt collections, explaining new patterns they had recently brainstormed. She proudly shared that she had received requests, both from LGBTQ organizations and from individuals in Bali, Bandung, and other Indonesian cities. Despite financial difficulties caused by COVID-19, she could still ‘sell her commodities online through platforms like Instagram, Shopee, and Tokopedia,’ which allowed her to continue earning income throughout the pandemic.

The second entrepreneur I met was Ratih,⁷ who headed up one of Yogyakarta’s oldest *waria* organizations, which used to be chaired by *Ibu Shinta*. Ratih is an avid cook and was thus aspired to open a café. During my preliminary fieldwork, she told me that she was ‘taking a break from her food business due to other work obligations, but planned to revive it when she has more time.’ Some *waria* I met raved about Ratih’s food, claiming that she is ‘one of the best cooks’ they know. When I asked Ratih about what sparked her interest in cooking, she laughed and said, ‘I love eating and all I can do all day every day is eat.’ She added that, in her free time, she loves going all around Yogyakarta to find ‘the best spots for street food.’ In fact, she had a list of ‘best spots for almost every single popular Indonesian dish,’ including *bakso*, *sate*, *mie ayam*, and others. Ratih has also taught Javanese dances to people in a variety of arts centres. I even had the chance to see her showcase her dancing skills during a Christian *waria* solidarity event, where, at the end of the event, *waria* came forward and danced to a Javanese pop song.

Both Bunga’s and Ratih’s cases illuminate the expansive possibilities that *waria* can have in Yogyakarta when given the right platform to express creativity and the opportunity to master their chosen skills. Individuals like them are role models to *waria* also seeking to achieve mobility and gain security,

⁶Pseudonym.

⁷Pseudonym.

particularly under conditions of financial hardship and other socio-psychological vulnerabilities as they navigate life in Yogyakarta.

Conclusion: Negotiating Precarity and New Modalities of Power

Precarity, a condition marked by persistent dynamics of uncertainty and inequality (Groot 2017; Kooy and Bowman 2019; Vallas 2015), yokes individual experiences to collective structures. While emotive triggers like anxiety and fear can be felt on an individual level, a precarious existence also demands that individuals work together to form institutional support. Gender nonconforming citizens like *waria*, as systemically precarious members of Indonesian society, have been developing multiple strategies to advocate for their *kesejahteraan* (welfare and prosperity) since 2016 and in the wake of COVID-19. This research highlights my preliminary findings on recent grassroots initiatives formed by members of the world's first trans women-led Islamic boarding school, Pondok Pesantren (PonPes) Waria Al-Fatah, to expand welfare and social services for *waria* communities in Yogyakarta. Using testimonies and narratives centred on key figures and members of PonPes Al-Fatah, which were collected during my preliminary fieldwork in 2022, I have examined three cutting-edge initiatives: (1) home farming, which seeks to increase *waria*'s access to basic sustenance; (2) establishing a crisis centre, which aims to provide vulnerable populations like elderly and ostracized *waria* with counselling and shelter; and (3) offering alternative job training to teach *waria* financial skills and find sustainable means of income.

The need to create such initiatives showcases how, in recent years, Yogyakarta's *waria* communities have faced new predicaments that intensify their conditions of precarity, such as food insecurity, unstable housing, healthcare inaccessibility, and unemployment. These situations have led *Ibu* Shinta, PonPes Al-Fatah's leader, to reimagine ways to give back sustainably to the community, ways that extend beyond providing a safe space for *waria* to perform Islamic worship. These efforts show how the rights to gain spiritual nurturance are no longer the sole priority and mission of PonPes Al-Fatah, an establishment widely recognized, at both the national and international level, as the centre of religious activism for transgender women in Indonesia. The home farming programme, for instance, is a creative approach to sustainable agriculture that is affordable and feasible for *waria* to practice independently. Partnering with an organization that specializes in farming methods on non-fertile land, the programme aims to teach major *waria* households how to plant spices, vegetables, and crops on bare soil at home, whether the soil is wet or dry. This initiative responded to widespread food insecurity among *waria* struggling to purchase groceries and consume nutritious food during and after the pandemic. Such problems have contributed to *waria*'s inability to meet their basic health needs.

Waria Crisis Center (WCC) has also enabled *waria* with emergency needs to access services like mental health counselling, shelter, and medical checkups — all of which are non-spiritual means of support for vulnerable *waria* populations. Additionally, the alternative job training programme was an initiative predominantly catering to younger *waria* and community members struggling to earn a regular income. This training introduces *waria* to occupations and imparts entrepreneurial skills that would grant them financial stability and independence, especially after the pandemic. Such professions include working as cooks, small-business owners, traditional dance teachers, and make-up artists. *Ibu* Shinta expressed that these alternative jobs would provide *waria* with the opportunity to become honourable members of society and transcend what she understood as undignified jobs that have placed *waria* in precarious positions.

These three initiatives illuminate new modalities of power in *waria*'s ongoing efforts to mobilize and gain basic rights under prevailing systems of inequalities, which adversely affect the lives of gender nonconforming citizens in Indonesia (Yulastini *et al.* 2018; Wijaya 2020). This study highlights a significant increase in *waria*'s prioritization surrounding health and welfare in their advocacy in Yogyakarta. This general move towards welfare issues, as a political strategy for gaining basic rights, provides new insights into Muslim *waria*'s activism and their conditions of precarity since COVID-19; predominantly scholars have defined such activism through a lens of religious piety and Islamic spirituality (Thajib 2017; Tidey 2019; Kjaran and Naeimi 2022). The significance of access to food security, physical-psychological well-being, and financial stability in *waria*'s human rights advocacy shows how Indonesian gender nonconforming citizens envision security in a rapidly-changing, modern world.

As part of the contemporary global LGBTQ rights movement (Belmonte 2020; Chua 2022), Yogyakarta's *waria* communities have indeed presented a model of how gender nonconforming citizens can successfully build coalitions, distribute resources, and lead social movements despite increasing Islamization and COVID-19-related uncertainties in Indonesia. At the same time, new anxieties have been looming in Yogyakarta's *waria* communities. *Ibu Shinta* expressed how 'in the next Indonesian general election in 2024, *waria* activists are anxious about politicians and Islamic figures utilizing LGBTQ issues to gain electability' because it could potentially spike pre-existing violence targeting *waria*. Unexpectedly, in February 2023, *Ibu Shinta* passed away, shocking the nation's *waria* and its broader LGBTQ communities. *Ibu Shinta*'s passing triggered changes of leadership at PonPes Al-Fatah and sparked questions about how the community can carry her legacy forwards — shifts I intend to capture as I reintegrate myself into these communities during my long-term fieldwork in late-2023. *Waria* are hyper-aware of the possibility of LGBTQ communities facing new predicaments in the future. However, as history has shown, this situation does not, and perhaps indeed will not, hinder the creative spirit and mobilizing capacity of *waria* communities, both locally in Yogyakarta and nationally throughout Indonesia.

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