SEX, CRIME AND ENTERTAINMENT

Images of LGBT in the Indonesian news media

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ABSTRACT

Images linking 'LGBT' to sexually motivated crime are a common feature of reporting in the Indonesian online news media. Many images of what are dubbed 'gay sex parties' are depicted through a spectacle shaped by images produced in collaboration with the police, who play a crucial role in managing both in what ways LGBT is seen and by extension what is defined as belonging to the public sphere. These take the form of videos and photographs taken at police raids, press conferences and reconstructions filmed at the crime scene. Although same-sex sexual acts between consenting adults is not a crime in Indonesia, the 2008 Pornography Law and various regional regulations do provide scope for detaining and people on public decency grounds. However, the connection between sex and crime as a form of entertainment in which the police are central protagonists is shaped by histories of visual power that can be traced to the authoritarian New Order. . By contextualising and interpreting media images of a police raid on a 'gay sex party' in September 2020, I describe how the genre conventions and affective force of images of LGBT are central to the state's governance of the public sphere in Indonesia. Considering the relationship between sex, crime and entertainment helps to further consider the central role played by both unruly images and media power in regulating the boundaries of political participation and claims to justice.

KEYWORDS

Criminality; image event; Indonesia; LGBT; mass media; police

Introduction

Since late 2015, media reporting and images related to LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender), have become a common focus of interest in the Indonesian news media.[1] Although by no means the first or only moral panic related to gender and sexuality which has transformed Indonesian society, the speed and collective force of attention given to the topic has been intense. LGBT remains a politically charged topic with serious political consequences.[2] As Jakarta-based media literacy non-governmental organisation Remotivi glibly reported in 2020, 'the media is now often regarded as the main culprit for the hostile environment toward marginalized groups in Indonesia' (Thaniago 2020: 1). Although images of LGBT in the news media have varied, one prominent feature has been spectacular police raids on gay men in spas and at parties, which have followed a routine format each time (Pausacker 2020b; Wijaya 2021).[3] Still images and videos of police raids on these events have depicted titillating images of half-naked figures, whose faces and bodies are blurred and in the process of being arrested or herded into waiting police transport vehicles. These images

[1] The 'LGBT moral panic', as it has come to be referred, emerged after the Minister for Technology, Research and Higher Education Minister Muhammad Nasir posted on Twitter that LGBT-identifying people 'should be banned from entering university campuses' (Hegarty and Thajib 2016). I have heard several theories, some of which appear rather plausible, which tie the timing of the LGBT moral panic to political machinations in the wake of the tense 2014 presidential election (see also Boellstorff 2016). The mainstream media drew on these and a growing host of commentary on LGBT to fan a concocted and entirely unbalanced media event (Ewing 2020). As a result, I use the term LGBT in this article not to refer to specific figures or practices among those who may identify as such, but rather to designate its use as a term which has come to generate significant political force in Indonesia.

[2] Although there have been many different moments in which images tied to sexual morality have been central to politics, one early example Indonesia was the 2005 'Pink Swing' controversy, which involved a conservative Islamic organisation wielding significant influence through engagement with the media (Lindsey and Pausacker 2016). Sexuality continues to be a catalyst for political action, for example, in 2019 efforts to revise the criminal code (Akbari 2019) and in 2020 in relation to the anti-sexual violence bill (Margret and Pandjaitan 2020). These debates remain ongoing and unsettled.

[3] Although prominent, gay men are not the only subject of the state's prurient and criminalising gaze. Police raids have also been undertaken on salons belonging to transgender women, as well as on boarding houses of masculine-presenting lesbian women and trans men. The dynamics of engagement for these latter groups is different than that for gay men. As Saskia Wieringa (2019: 124) notes, transgender and gender nonconforming people are 'the most visible members of the LGBT community'. Historically, since the New Order, Indonesian trans feminine populations known as *waria* have described themselves as visible all of the time, which has brought its own advantages and problems (Hegarty 2018). It is notable that the visibility of *waria* is usually not associated with LGBT.

are broadcast in the news media, after which they are appropriated and shared widely on social media and online news platforms.

The men arrested in these raids have commonly been charged under provisions contained in the 2008 Pornography Law, Article 1 of which outlaws 'performances in public that contain obscenity or sexual exploitation that violates the moral norms in society' (Lindsey 2019: 42). Depending on the location of the raid, the men arrested have also been detained for rehabilitation under the provisions of regional regulations which pertain to 'public decency' and 'prostitution'. Journalists, social media users and others engaging with images in the Indonesian news media have not only reported on these raids but have been active participants in shaping their genre conventions. Image producers have created a ready stream of photographs and videos, which are shared and tagged as evidence of LGBT criminality. These images now constitute a ready source of stock images that are drawn on and used in the context of reporting on LGBT in the Indonesian mainstream media. Of course, LGBT-identified Indonesians have responded and often resisted this limited framing by drawing on the possibilities available to them through access to the international news media and social media.[4] Nevertheless, and although criminal spectacle is not the only form of visibility available to LGBT communities for consumption by Indonesian mass publics, it is a critical and common locus for the formulation and extension of visual forms of state power.

Although LGBT has recently become a focal point for contestations about Indonesian national identity in post-authoritarian Indonesia, sexuality has played a central role in

[4] These efforts to achieve justice and demand the right to control how one is seen through the market-driven logics of social media also have their limits. For example, in May 2020, the YouTube influencer Ferdian Paleka made a video which ridiculed a group of transgender women in the Indonesian media. Rather than be evaluated as humorous by his audiences, however, the video became the subject of sustained and widespread public ire, which eventually resulted in Paleka's arrest. Despite widespread celebration of the events as a moment of inclusivity, however, the trans women whose images were included in this video remained largely absent from critiques of their representation within the national media. Rather, these images seemed to gravitate towards the entertainment value inherent in exposing Ferdian Paleka and which led to his arrest, with the influencer subsequently leveraging the publicity that he obtained from this image event to further build his career.

national politics since at least the Suharto's bloody ascendence in 1965.[5] I use 'post-authoritarian' to draw attention to the way that contemporary Indonesian politics is shaped by the historical experience of 30 years of authoritarian rule. Although former president Suharto stepped down in 1998 following mass protests, heralding the beginning of the reform period known as *reformasi*, the symbolic and material aspects of New Order politics persist. Politicians have commonly referred to LGBT as representative of an 'organisation without form' (*organisasi tanpa bentuk*), the very phrase that was used throughout the New Order to dramatise the threat posed by communism and constant vigilance that its presence demanded (Boellstorff 2016; Wieringa 2019). The period since 1998 has witnessed fierce contestations over the visibility of symbols related to sex and sexuality in defining the public sphere in ways that depart from its historical treatment during the New Order, which focused on an explicit heterosexual ideology rather than the explicit condemnation of homosexuality that Evelyn Blackwood (2007: 295) refers to as the 'deployment of gender', which 'affects and reconstitutes everyday practices and norms of sexuality so that marriage is the only possible place and future for sexuality'. The emergent public sentiment that LGBT is incompatible with the nation has unfolded as part of the historical and cultural specificities of post-authoritarian Indonesian media and politics.

Since the beginning of the New Order, gay and lesbian conferences and meetings have attracted violent forms of protest, most often by groups – most notably the notorious FPI (Front Pembela Islam) – who have claimed to speak on behalf of an Islamic public.

[5] Military general Suharto came to power following the murky events of 1965 and subsequent mass violence against members of the Indonesian Communist Party. Saskia Wieringa (2002) has described the gendered dimension of New Order claims to legitimacy, which rested on falsified claims that members of Gerwani, the women's organisation of the Indonesian Communist Party, committed acts of sexual violence on military generals captured during the coup attempt. The events of 1965, and the basis on which the New Order state claimed legitimacy, must be interpreted as a form of sexual politics premised on the subordination of women and other sexual minorities. Yet the relationship between sexuality and crime extends beyond the New Order; one of the first 'raids' on European men for engaging in same-sex sexual practices with Indonesian men taking place during the colonial period (Bloembergen 2011). My hope is that this article contributes in some way to a greater historicisation of the LGBT moral panic within its specific Indonesian historical and cultural coordinates.

Following These political contestations over sexuality are shaped by broader political dynamics, reflecting struggles over how 'the nation' represents itself to itself (Boellstorff 2004). Yet these transformations, and their representation in the national media, has had significant legal and social effects. As Hendri Yulius Wijaya (2021: 4) describes, representations of LGBT in Indonesia have increasingly informed a 'making and dividing of the public and the private arbitrarily using legal mechanisms in order to allow and disallow particular sexual practices, institutions, or relations in public'. The reasons for the fixation on gay men may stem from their complicated relationship to public visibility in Indonesia, in which they are 'open' (*terbuka*) in some settings and 'closed' (*tertutup*) in others (Boellstorff 2005). A key aspect of the political dynamic and drama of visibility which operates here appears to lie in the exposure of those who, on the surface, appear to be '*normal*' (in Indonesian, a euphemism for heterosexual) but whose desires are putatively incompatible with a heterosexual national identity. Police raids that dramatically reveal the presence of gay men as a part of everyday life in Indonesia have emerged as part of a process of redefining the distinction between the public and private spheres, and the power of the state to regulate it.

The proliferation of media reporting about the dangers that LGBT poses to the nation since the mid 2010s followed extensive political debate over pornography in the preceding decade. The 2008 Pornography Law criminalised both the representation and public performance of wide-ranging practices, many of which are only nominally related to sexuality (Lindsay 2010). Political anxieties over pornography have had far-reaching effects on Indonesia's democracy. Also in 2008, state legislators and experts justified the draconian Information and Electronic Transactions Law by referring to the risks posed by pornography and sexually explicit content to young people (Lim 2013; Tapsell 2017). These efforts by the state to curb sexuality under the guise of pornography preceded what scholars of Indonesia

have identified as part of a wider 'democratic stagnation' (Mietzner 2012: 209), reflected in political interference in independent institutions, extending to recent attacks on the well regarded Corruption Eradication Commission (Butt 2019a). The increased visibility granted to LGBT in the media has played an important role, both as metaphor for opaque political visibility and a catalyst for populist laws and regulations, in justifying political anxieties about the risks posed by excesses of 'freedom' (*kebebasan*) and an 'out of control' (*kebablasan*) media to Indonesian society in the post-authoritarian period.

The state and its agents, and particularly the police, have taken an active stance in shaping the genre conventions and political meanings of images of LGBT which circulate in the Indonesian media. I focus on the role of the police in managing the relationship between sex, crime and entertainment by interpreting the images circulated in media reporting about a 'gay sex party' held at a private apartment in Kuningan in central Jakarta on September 2020 (hereon, the Kuningan raid), at which 56 men were arrested (for an account, see Human Rights Watch 2020). While a single event, the Kuningan raid took place in the context of similar raids in previous years. Journalists, image producers, the police and Indonesia's television and online news media, all play a role in shaping the political horizons against which the meanings of LGBT have emerged in Indonesia. To follow Zeynep Gürsel (2016: 4), journalists and the police are actively engaged in creating and sharing images that are 'not just illustrative of current events but often also newsworthy themselves or even factors in causing events'. In this respect, the Kuningan raid illustrates a broader pattern in the representation of LGBT in the Indonesian media. The images that circulated were largely restricted to those taken at a press conference held by the police and a subsequent 'crime scene reconstruction' (*reka ulang*), in which those who had been arrested undertook a performance of the alleged crimes. The repetition and predictability of images of LGBT speaks to way that specific genre conventions at the intersection of entertainment and crime

do not only represent but shape political mobilisations underway in contemporary Indonesia. The relationship between crime, sex and entertainment in turn limits who can participate in public life, and reveals the limits of visibility as a means to accomplish political recognition.

LGBT as criminal spectacle

Since late 2015, efforts to make LGBT transparent as a threat to the nation has played a prominent role in shaping Indonesian political life. Having undertaken ethnographic research with communities of *waria* (trans women) since 2014, and having studied their historical efforts to obtain political recognition through visibility since the New Order, I watched as LGBT grew in visibility, circulating rapidly through social and news media. On social media in early 2016, friends posted images of colourful temporary banners (*spanduk*) with large type text presenting an array of statements, such as 'reject LGBT', 'Lesbi & Homo are banned from entering our district', and 'Indonesia is under threat from LGBT' hoisted at major intersections in small and large cities. Erected hastily overnight and bearing the insignia of mass organisations, these banners seemed to emanate from 'the people' in laying a claim to popular legitimacy (see also Strassler 2020: 194–205). Another early instance of reporting about LGBT was a 2016 episode of the programme 'Indonesian Lawyer's Club', broadcast on television commercial channel TV One. Entitled 'Beware – Are LGBT targeting children?' the programme focused on a crime involving the exploitation of underage children. On it, groups of ordinary Indonesians living around where the crime had taken place expressed their grave concerns about the threat posed by LGBT to the family. What was powerful in each of these early apparitions of LGBT was their emergence through informal forms of political communication, which seemed to mushroom in the absence of any official endorsement.

Since this time, media images of LGBT have both become more commonplace in the Indonesian media. A host of different representations – mostly on television – have brought the popular 'rejection of LGBT' (*tolak LGBT*) into more direct contact with the fetish of state power, chiefly through images representing instances where same-sex sexuality constitutes a crime. Such popular images, connecting LGBT to the thrills and excesses of sexually motivated crime, bring to mind the close connection between crime and entertainment that has long been present in the Indonesian news media, stretching as far back as the colonial period (Nordholt and van Till 1999). More recently, during the New Order, James Siegel (1998) argued that newspaper stories did not only represent but created a shadowy 'criminal type', one whose liminal relationship to the nation served to justify the extra-judicial killings of members of the urban poor in the early 1980s. At this time, and with state endorsement, the military and militia members murdered an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 people in 'mysterious killings' (Bourchier 1990; van der Kroef 1985). One effect of these representations of crime was to dehumanise those depicted but also to generate a sense of anticipation among a viewing public, who were left to speculate who precisely 'the criminal' was. As was the case in the 1980s (Siegel 1998: 81–82), the connection between sexual excess and violent crime has remained a feature of post-authoritarian Indonesian news media. Describing the prominent case of the gay male serial killer known as Ryan, whose crimes were reported in the media as motivated by an unbridled desire for consumer goods, Carla Jones (2014: 169) has noted a broader pattern in which 'extreme consumer desire is … both feminizing and criminalizing'. Rather than a secondary concern, sex has been a central preoccupation in media reporting about crime for a very long time.

Increased preoccupation with the suspected criminality of LGBT in the Indonesian media has also moved apace with public commentary and debate regarding proposed changes to laws and regulations governing sexuality at the national level. A constitutional court case

brought by the Family Love Alliance (Aliansi Cinta Keluarga, AILA) in 2016 (Butt 2019b), and drafts of the revised criminal code (Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pindana, KUHP) produced between 2017 and 2019 have introduced the possibility of criminalising same-sex sexual acts (Pausacker 2020b). While these various drafts – none of which have been passed into law at the time of writing this article – have differed in their scope (ranging from a ban on same-sex sexuality, to a ban on all forms of non-marital sex), one version circulated in 2018 had provisions that 'would make it a criminal offence to perform "indecent acts" (*perbuatan cabul*) with a person of the same sex in public' (Lindsey and Butt 2018: 203). While these revisions to the criminal code have stalled, police and state prosecutors have all the while used provisions under the 2008 Pornography Law to prosecute men and women who engage in same-sex sexuality. According to a 2018 Human Rights Watch report on LGBT rights in Indonesia, almost all of the 300 LGBT-identified Indonesians arrested in 2017 were charged under this law (Harsono and Knight 2018). Although the law relates to pornography, it refers specifically to same-sex and other forms of sexuality in terms of 'pornographic action' (*pornoaksi*). A rather expansive interpretation of 'pornographic action' means that it might be defined as any activities conducted in public which elicit desire in viewers, revealing a construction of regulating sexuality that is concerned with the effects of pornography on the viewer (Bellows 2011; Lindsay 2010). For example, the Pornography Law has been used to charge actors and celebrities in pornographic films, and individuals in private sex tapes leaked to the press, rather than those who circulated the material (Pausacker 2020a). Since 2016, police and prosecutors have made extensive use of the Pornography Law, using it to change people for both same-sex sexuality and for engaging in heterosexual sex outside of marriage as well.

In addition to the Pornography Law, the police have also detained individuals under provisions included in the burgeoning numbers of regional regulations in a range of places in

Indonesia. Since 1998, many regional and municipal governments have enacted a range of by-laws and regulations that regulate a narrow definition of 'moral behaviour' in public (Butt 2010). Although these laws differ from place to place, they generally use similar text, usually derived from a narrow interpretation of Islamic law which is usually aimed at preventing prostitution or limiting women's mobility and appearance (Rinaldo 2013). Several regions have introduced regulations which include provisions to detain and rehabilitate individuals for the 'sin' (*maksiat*) of engaging in same-sex sexuality and gender nonconformity in some way (Katjasungkana et al. 2016). These newer regulations build on older regional laws which have long been used as a justification for the detention of transgender women and female sex workers in police raids. What both the Pornography Law and regional regulations share is their distinctive orientation towards defining what can be seen in 'public' (*di muka umum*), tied to efforts to define and defend 'public morality' (*kesusilaan umum*) and 'public order' (*ketertiban umum*), both concepts inherited from colonial-era regulations (Hegarty 2021, 2022). Given their status as regional by-laws, they do not generally result in criminal prosecution without a corresponding breach of a national law. Although there is not sufficient research on the effects and use of regional laws, in my experience those who are detained in raids (*razia*) are subject to detention for the purposes of rehabilitation or 'return' to their family (which in itself serves as a form of punishment). This concern for regulating the public now extends to a focus on the participation in and the effects of an image-driven media.

In a context where definitions of the public are so central to understandings of sexuality, what is seen in the media plays an important role in justifying expanded legal regulations and disciplinary mechanisms over it. For transgender, gay and lesbian Indonesians, visibility in public has long been a delicate problem which they have had to navigate. However, in post-authoritarian Indonesia, this visibility now takes place on 'a stage of competing publics, with each public asserting its own vision of the post-authoritarian

nation and citizenship in an age of democratization' (Paramaditha 2018: 77). The public visibility of gay men in public space, and their corresponding relationship to transnational LGBT rights, has taken on a politically charged meaning tied to the future of the nation. In this context, criminalisation is not , ''based only on their sexual orientation but can be further justified by the level of public-ness of their activities', leading to a situation where 'the boundaries between public and private are flexible and subject to an arbitrary determination' (Wijaya 2021: 14). The mechanisms through which the boundaries of public and private are governed are shaped by broader power struggles underway in Indonesian politics. In the context of a decentralised media, and alongside competing civil society groups which struggle to present their own vision of the nation, the police actively participate in shaping this boundary.

Those who are arrested and exposed appear to be caught in the paradox of visibility as a means to achieve political recognition in post-authoritarian Indonesia. Claims for LGBT rights are made through the display of documentary evidence of harm. On the cover of the prominent and widely distributed 2018 Human Rights Watch report is a rather remarkable image of a police officer in tactical equipment holding a machine gun, guarding a premises that had been raided during a 'gay sex party' at the Atlantis spa in Jakarta (Harsono and Knight 2018). This image, taken by photojournalists who covered the raid, highlights one example of how human rights organisations harness images of criminal spectacle and leverage that visibility in an effort to claim redress through international human rights mechanisms. At the same time, a fetish for evidentiary images can transform visibility into harmful forms of exposure for vulnerable citizens. Karen Strassler (2020) has described the perils of visibility faced by Chinese Indonesian women raped during the riots that accompanied Suharto's downfall in 1998. Their claims to recognition and desires for justice were met with demands that they produce visual evidence of the rapes, reflecting the

overlapping logics of visibility in the form of state surveillance and possibility for justice within prevailing human rights frameworks which rely on evidence. In this climate, Chinese Indonesian women rightly feared coming forward with evidence of their claims, given the hostility of state actors and 'pornographic public consumption of their bodily suffering' (Strassler 2020: 76). This is an experience shared by many victims of sexual violence in Indonesia, who – as research conducted by the National Commission for Women (Komnas Perempuan) has documented – are routinely exposed and interrogated openly in the media (Komnas Perempuan 2015). Images related to LGBT that circulate in the mainstream public sphere may similarly share a register of probing consumption, transforming the possibility of recognition into the risk of exposure.

The Kuningan raid

On 28 August 2020, police raided a party held at a private apartment in Kuningan in central Jakarta. The police claimed that the party was attended by 56 men who formed part of a private group that routinely organised such events. Although not reported on the night of the party, a few days later in early September, news of the party and corresponding police raid started to circulate widely in the media. In the days and weeks that followed, online news media published accounts of a 'Kuningan Gay Sex party'. News reports paid close attention to the fact that the party contravened public health restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and to the 'Independence Day' theme celebrating Indonesia's national independence on 17 August (Ernes 2020). This theme was offered as a particularly visually titillating component of the case, with widespread mockery of the appropriation of Independence Day to partake in sexually explicit activities. The police subsequently announced that the men would be charged under the provisions of the 2008 Pornography Law and the national criminal code related to the profits of prostitution (Nurbaiti 2020).

Information about the raid travelled quickly via online news websites, with images taken from different sources edited and cropped into short videos and images which circulated on social media. Media agencies broadcast the same content as television, although usually edited to fit the format, through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Twitter. This format means that they are more easily appropriated, recirculated and commented on by users.

The visual logic that this event deployed in 2020 rested on a trope that had developed during media reporting on similar raids in previous years. In 2016 and 2017, police in the cities of Surabaya and Jakarta raided and arrested dozens of men under the provisions of the 2008 Pornography Law for participating in what was referred to in the press as a 'gay sex party' (Wijaya 2020: 5). In 2018, a Human Rights Watch report made specific reference to the role of the media in anti-LGBT sentiment; raids were commonly preceded by the surveillance of social media and a tip-off to the news media, with journalists invited to accompany the police (Harsono and Knight 2018: 4). Hendri Yulius Wijaya (2020: 159) has noted that it was through 'voyeuristic media reports of these "dramatic" incidents … [that] the category LGBT was increasingly associated and framed as insatiable sexuality, sex parties, and immorality'. Disseminated without any specific attachment to a given time or place, images which circulated in the media were not necessarily indexical of a single party or event. This had the effect of generating what Zeynep Gürsel (2016: 22) has called a 'futurepast', a feature of information-saturated and interconnected global news media which seek to ensure that 'what the world will want to see tomorrow has been anticipated and captured visually today'. The images of raids, in turn, underpinned a visual pedagogy that sought to constrain both how LGBT could be seen and how alternative ways of seeing and hence claims for justice could be prevented from coming into view.

The Kuningan raid was covered widely in the media during the first weeks of September 2020. Rather than reported on as a live event, as had been the case previously, the first reports only appeared five days after the raid. The police press conference and corresponding reconstruction at the crime scene – both held on 2 September – marked the first mention of the raid in the media. The reasons for the delay in reporting the events of the police raid are unclear. Yet the Indonesian police is an institution which actively engages in public relations exercises, seeking to shape its public image as protectors of the nation (Davies and Hartono 2015; Davies et al. 2016). In this respect, the Kuningan raid was a somewhat concocted image event, lacking an unmediated or 'live' access to the authentic events as they happened. Nevertheless, the Kuningan raid generated media attention and interest over several weeks. Even without images of the actual events, reports of the raid attracted extensive attention: quantified in the hundreds of television news reports, webpages, social media pages, and posts covering the raid. These reports overwhelmingly drew on evidentiary form of images provided by the police, in the form of a press conference and crime scene reconstruction. Both types of images reveal the role of the state and the media in shaping the possibilities through which political visibility can serve as a means to accomplish justice in Indonesia.

The press conference

Most of the images that accompanied the reporting of the raid circulated by news agencies consisted of those taken in the course of a press conference held on 2 September by the Jakarta metropolitan police. The police spokesperson, Yusri Yunus, stated to the media that the police would make an announcement about 'the problem of LGBT' later that day (Ernes 2020). This announcement was made in the form of a press conference that was broadcast on a popular news bulletin dealing exclusively with crime, 'Tajuk Kriminal Perkotaan' (Urban

Crime Headlines) aired on the commercial television station Trans TV. Many of the subsequent online news articles and accompanying images made reference to the fact that the party was 'inspired by a similar event in Thailand', corresponding with a broad emphasis on LGBT as foreign.

Screened live on television and later posted as an online video to YouTube, the press conference featured speeches by police about the crimes, a report of the number of people arrested, and a visual display of evidence that was collected to charge them under the 2008 Pornography Law. The 15 men who had been arrested wore orange jackets and stood in a row (Figure 1). They wore masks; perhaps due to mask mandates imposed during the pandemic, but in a symbolic register continuous with a broader pattern which predates the pandemic wherein the faces of those accused of crimes are concealed with ski masks and other face coverings. There was no opportunity for the suspects to question their guilt or to respond to the charges laid against them.

Figure 1. Arrested men standing side by side, in front of whom is a uniformed police spokesperson. (Pesta Gay di Kuningan Terinspirasi Kegiatan Serupa di Thailand [The Kuningan gay party was inspired by a similar event in Thailand], https://metro.tempo.co/read/1382178/pesta-gay-di-kuningan-terinspirasi-kegiatan-serupa-di-thailand, *Tempo,* 3 September 2020).

In addition to the live coverage of the press conference on Trans TV, dozens of journalists from different news agencies appear to have been present. The unencumbered access granted to journalists at the press conference suggests the proximity of their relationship to the police. The only other people visible in the frame were various police officers, of whom only the spokesperson wore a uniform. He stood, smiling, and taking various poses at the request of the journalists present, clearly enjoying his performance for the cameras. In front of him, he displayed packets of evidence gathered by the police,

containing condoms and other items confiscated during the course of the raid which itself furnished evidence of criminality. These images did not appear to elicit anything new or to provide further insights into the raid, but nevertheless played a central role in shaping how the event was seen and interpreted. Other visual artefacts, incorporating images of promotional posters for the Kuningan event – which include social realist-inspired illustrations of two men holding up a book against a red and white background, depicting Indonesia's national flag – were published by the media in subsequent days (Figure 2). Although the source of these documents was not stated, these too appeared to have been provided by the police.

Figure 2. The poster reported to have been circulated in promoting the event, featuring an illustration depicting two men holding up a book on which the text 'new normal' is written, on a red and white background. The text on the illustration reads: 'We call the finest young men in the nation! Gather together, young men' [*Kami memanggil putra-putra terbaik bangsa! Koempoel – koempoel pemoeda*]. (Penyelenggara Pesta Gay Kuningan Terinspirasi dari Thailand [The organisers of the Kuningan Gay Party got inspiration from Thailand], <https://www.inews.id/news/nasional/penyelenggara-pesta-gay-kuningan-terinspirasi-dari-thailand> 2 September 2020).

One set of images, posted on the online news website Kumpuran.com's Instagram page, reflects how such images were taken up and transformed as they were posted on social media (Kumpuran.com 2020). The Instagram post is a curated a series of images from the press conference (Figure 3). The first in the series of images is a video, the still image showing a uniformed police officer standing close to the men wearing orange outfits worn by those in police custody in Indonesia. Over this image, there is a superimposed caption which reads: 'A gay party "to celebrate independence"'. Another image in the series is also taken from the press conference, depicting those arrested standing in a line, accompanied by the

caption, ‘47 attendees wore clothes with a dress code of red and white’, a reference to the colours of the Indonesian flag. As in other cases, text and captions which accompanied these images, worked to recontextualise these images as representative of criminality. For example, text overlaid onto the images often consisted of a list of evidence produced and laws those pictured were accused to have broken, regardless of what was depicted in that image.

Figure 3. A police officer at the press conference standing in front of the arrested men, with text over the image. (@kumparan Instagram, 3 September 2020).

The images posted and circulated by digital news websites on social media shaped how LGBT was represented and experienced within Indonesia’s public sphere. Adapted for use as social media posts, both the image in Figure 3 and other images in the series established a distinct posture towards their audience, working within a commercial context which emphasises ‘affect and emotion as the main currencies’ (Lim 2017: 315). Social media also has the advantage of making images easily subject to modification and further circulation, moving from one medium, such as television, to another, such as Instagram. Images posted on social media accounts of these news agencies usually took the form of photographs or short video clips and were often composed as a series of images presented as a slideshow. In addition to the fact that individuals could ‘like’, ‘share’ and comment on images, the social media format of these videos and images also meant that they were readily decontextualised. Editors and journalists cropped and repositioned images of the press conference in order to maximise their effect, while promising direct access to both factual events and entertainment. Even as they circulated widely on social media, the power of such images nevertheless remained tied to their status as truth claims on the basis that they were forms of authentic evidence that had originated from the police..

*Crime scene reconstruction (*reka ulang*)*

Apart from the police press conference, the affective incitement tied to these quasi-evidentiary images drew on photographs and videos from images generated by police and journalists, known as the 'crime scene reconstruction' (*reka ulang*). The *reka ulang* for the Kuningan raid was recorded and screened on the same day as the police press conference on 2 September. The *reka ulang*, while a formal component of evidence gathering by the police and is based on police interview or *berita acara pemeriksaan*, has also been a form of entertainment filmed and broadcast in a style similar to reality television since the 1990s (Hobart 2006; Kitley 2000: 256). The *reka ulang* emerged as a component of Indonesian commercial television in the context of a broader shift towards spectacular crime reporting on television in an effort to increase ratings. Indonesian human rights practitioners have criticised the ethics of this close integration between the media and the police, through which audiences are prejudiced against suspects or where police use excessive violence for its entertainment value (Harsono 2004). Alongside *reka ulang*, television journalists also embedded themselves with the police, sometimes broadcasting (and even serving as the catalyst for) violence live on television. The police and television media thus worked together in shaping the production of new genre conventions and audiences for crime. I also speculate that such dehumanising Indonesian crime programmes grew out of an earlier focus on 'criminality' in tabloid journalism during the New Order (Siegel 1998). In the case of the *reka ulang,* the police direct those arrested to reconstruct the alleged crime, drawing on interviews with the suspects and other witnesses as a kind of script, asking for clarification and expansion on points that they have referred to as they re-enact it. Often, the *reka ulang* exceeds the events as they have been recounted to police, which are enhanced and embellished for the purposes of providing better television material.

What makes the *reka ulang* powerful is that it is a common format on Indonesian television, one that is particularly prominent in the case of violent crimes. Journalists play an important but largely unacknowledged role, working together with the police to shape the style and format of media images, which are frequently edited and set to music to add a sense of suspense and drama. *Reka ulang* are often broadcast live on television, and as such are often taken as evidence of an accused person's guilt, even before the case has gone to trial. In this sense, although a reconstruction of past events, *reka ulang* are themselves presented as evidence of criminality, demonstrating the power of visual technology to offer a sense of 'direct access to events and the transparent transmission of truths' (Strassler 2020: 223). This is the case even when images do not represent the events that took place. In this respect, a key aspect of images linking sex, crime and entertainment emerges in the format offered by television news; even when viewed on YouTube and other social media platforms, such images preserve a combination of news and editorial reportage, thus generating a sense of live and unmediated access to real events and thus as evidence of the guilt of those pictured.

Figure 4 shows the *reka ulang* that was conducted at the crime scene location, showing a man in an orange shirt who sits with the police standing in different positions around him. One police officer holds an arrow pointing at the suspect, while another takes a photograph of the scene. The *reka ulang* pictured here appears in a video shared on the YouTube channel of the news agency, Warta Kota Production (2020); in it, a group of handcuffed men in orange t-shirts are directed to the centre of the room, wearing their names on pieces of paper which are hung around their necks. The police officers pictured carry clipboards, from which they read out instructions to the men to take up positions, while offering clarification where events differ from those narrated by the suspect in the interview. In this case, the *reka ulang* played a vital role given the absence of images of the actual event, standing in as truthful images of the crime scene itself. Without these evidentiary images,

which claimed to offer unmediated access to the truth, this story may have been lost. The evidentiary claims made by these images of the men arrested in the Kuningan raid performing the *reka ulang* under the direction of the police therefore produced the very evidence of criminality that it only purported to represent. It was through these images that the police claimed the authority to charge these men with a crime.

Journalists and social media producers working for these news agencies played a key role in buttressing ways of seeing LGBT in relation to sex, crime and entertainment. They largely failed to offer alternate images other than those provided by the police. In the Kuningan raid, there were two *reka ulang* undertaken; one at the police station, and another at the venue where the party had been held (Figure 4). Although the conventions of the *reka ulang* hold that it is scripted based on police interviews with witnesses and the suspects, the demand for media spectacle inherent to the *rekau ulang* meant that it can be subject to variation. In several of the videos taken by different journalists at the same event, it is possible to see journalists working with police to actively shape the angle, performances, and position of those in the frame, dramatic flourishes that likely went beyond the events that took place. The *reka ulang* both reflects a key component of the ambiguous relationship between truth and fiction in post-authoritarian Indonesia. It also shows other how – like other politically savvy operators in Indonesia – the police are engaged actively in their own forms of image management, seeking to portray themselves as moral saviours of the nation. In this environment, the police worked to provide images that they were able to circulate with speed via their close relationship with the news media, a strategy which served to generate widespread commentary and interest in the case.

Figure 4. Still image of the *reka ulang* taken on 3 September at the Kuningan Suites hotel, the location of the crime scene. A group of police stand around a single young man wearing an orange shirt with a sign hanging around his neck. A police officer standing to the left takes a photograph of

him, while another police officer standing immediately next to him holds a small arrow pointing towards him. (Mengejutkan Fakta Baru Pesta Gay di Apartemen The Kuningan Suites [Startling new facts about the gay party in the Kuningan Suites apartment], <https://jakarta.suara.com/read/2020/09/03/153822/mengejutkan-fakta-baru-pesta-gay-di-apartemen-the-kuningan-suites> 3 September 2020.

The images related to the Kuningan raid operated as a form of political communication that shaped the viability of LGBT visibility as a claim to justice in the Indonesian media. A news video published by Inews.id simultaneously on their website and distributed on the social media application TikTok, drew on the reconstruction video filmed by police, inviting commentary from and recirculation by social media users. The short video included an edited collage taken from the original *reka ulang* broadcast on television and posted on YouTube. Images from the *reka ulang* included men being led from a bus into an apartment building. Captions offering a chronology of the event placed over the video gave a sense that the videos had captured authentic images of a live event; 'Police raid gay sex party in Kuningan, 56 people arrested', 'According to the police, there were a number of requirements for attending the gay party', 'All of those involved were required to go along with COVID-19 health protocols', 'Upon entry, participants were required to strip to their underwear' (Ma'ruf 2020). Nowhere in the video was there an explanation that the images were not filmed live during a raid, but rather depicted a reconstruction of events undertaken with the oversight of the police. Nor was there any further context offered for the reconstruction as part of a wider legal process, and that the trial had yet to take place. Rather, through appending short text to decontextualised images, and circulated as a form of entertainment, these images did not only represent but produced the meanings attached to LGBT in public.

Seeing LGBT in public

Images of police raids on ‘gay sex parties’, including the Kuningan raid of 2020 addressed in this article, reveal the role played by images linking crime, sex and entertainment within a broader politics of visibility in post-authoritarian Indonesia. The prominence of the police and its agents as an institution preoccupied with and which enjoyed partaking in these public performances reflects the ongoing role of ‘criminality’ which ties the state to its citizens. The proliferation of these images operates to limit who can participate in public life and make claims on behalf of the nation, yet fetishises the role of images as vehicles of transparency and authenticity. The images of the Kuningan raid that I have introduced here not only reported on a police raid but transformed the promise of LGBT rights into a dangerous and unwanted form of exposure. This possibility developed out of historical patterns of visual power and the emergence of media technologies which facilitate the rapid appropriation, circulation and decontextualisation of images. Despite the promise of democratic participation in online media environments, ultimately the persistence of representational logics linking truth to media images means that this is a challenging environment within which minorities can contest how they are seen. Those depicted ultimately have little control over the way that images of them will be seen and circulated.

I contend that the ongoing vitality of images of LGBT within Indonesian politics suggests that concerns about sexuality must be understood in terms that go beyond a moral panic. Rather, these images of LGBT – and a narrowing of how LGBT can be seen – form part of a broader battle waged over who has the right to be seen and on what basis and hence speak for an Indonesian public. LGBT is part of a broader political economy of images. To better understand the implications of these forms of visibility – and its effects on those who have little control over the way that their images are seen and circulated – it is crucial to ask why it is that the state and its agents continue to actively connect sex, crime and entertainment. In what ways does post-authoritarian reform and criminality mutually produce

and shape each other within a diminishing horizon for achieving justice? Just as equally, what might a response to state and media power in a context where visibility is no sure means to achieve recognition be? One response to these questions is offered by human rights organisations, which have used these forms of criminal spectacle to make claims to LGBT rights; after all, images of police raids serve as transparent evidence of the persecution of gender and sexual minorities by the state. But when agents of the state work together with the media to mobilise a collective public through titillating forms of crime as entertainment, the transparency of images and the further visibility it demands provides no promise of justice but merely the risk of further exposure.

Media images of police raids on gay sex parties highlight how the genre conventions, affective styles and methods for circulating images in the Indonesian media are shaped by historical patterns of visual power. They also suggest a context in which images, despite their relationship to evidence and transparency, can themselves forestall the possibility of justice. For those pictured participating in the Kuningan raid and whose identities were shared and circulated online, these images served as a loss of face. In images of the press conference and at the *reka ulang* produced by the police, those arrested avert their eyes from the camera, looking down at the floor. There was little space to counter the gaze of a watching public or for those represented to assert the right to be seen in a different light. As was the case in past events, the stories of those depicted were quickly passed over in the mainstream media, their images serving as either evidence of LGBT criminality or of evidence of the violation of LGBT rights. They could produce no counter-images, and there was little room to contest the visibility which framed them in terms that limited them to sex, crime and entertainment. All that was left to do was to wait for the media to tire of this particular spectacle, before it moved on to the next. It is at this intersection between sating desires for entertainment from mass publics, and historical patterns of visual power in the post-authoritarian state, that

Indonesia's gender and sexual minorities contend with an LGBT image event which continues to unfold.

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