

“Priawan” Identity Construction in Indonesia *Preliminary Study of the Third Gender*

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Keywords: social construction, identity, *Priawan*, sexuality, gender

Abstract: Gender identity in Indonesia remains problematic, as there are persistent cases of transgender shaming. The development of Indonesian gender identity is based on binary assumptions that women and men are the only two genders in the context of social construction, and that there is no third or fourth gender. However, it is socially accepted that there have been other genders beyond the existing binary genders, from the beginning of the 18th century in the classic La Galigo texts of the ancient Bugis in South Sulawesi. These texts have recognised five types of gender. A transwoman is someone who is male yet is female in appearance. However, there are also cases of *priawan*; females who prefer to look like males. *Priawan* are biological females. They have not been well recognised in public discourse. This research was conducted in Jakarta and Surabaya, which represent the two biggest cities in Indonesia. Five respondents were interviewed using the snowball sampling technique, and the interview contained semi-structured questions. In this study, we found that it is not possible to automatically determine gender identity according to biological sex. By using Butler’s theoretical performance approach, *priawan* form their subjective identity through the construction of self-identity. On the path to the creation of self-identity, the *priawan* often suffer from harassment from society, in the workplace and even from their family. We conclude that *priawan* belong to the third gender, in which their body remains female but they feel and represent themselves as males.

1 INTRODUCTION

A variety of gender identities has culturally existed in Indonesia since the 18th century, as well as being found in the ancient records of the Bugis tribe in South Sulawesi, in a document called the La Galigo record. It recognises the existence of genders other than male and female, divided into five in the context of the Bugis culture. These are: *Uroane* (male), *Makunrai* (female), *Calabai* (male-looking woman), *Calalai* (female-looking male) and *Bissu* (neither male nor female). This narrative shows that diversity in the terms or titles referring to identity has existed in Indonesia for a long time, including the identity and existence of the third gender itself.

The understanding of identity is significant in cultural studies. In brief, identity is the concept of the self. Based on thinking development, the issue of identity is a complicated matter. It is not just about answering about the question of ‘who am I?’. It involves a deeper understanding of what or who an

individual is, which becomes a complex and problematic issue.

When it relates to the modern era, *Priawan* is a term used to describe women who live as men. There are also *Calalai*. The creation of this term is the opposite of transwoman (male-looking woman) or *Calabai*. There is still the question or whether or not *Priawan* can be considered an identity or not. Stuart Hall argued that identity is a flexible construction, a process, and that it is not only ‘a being’ but also ‘becoming’. This becomes the basic difference between ‘who we are’ and who we become’. This ‘becoming’ process happens continuously, depending on the social, culture, space, place and other situations (Rutherford, 1990).

There are various aspects involved in the searching and identity forming processes. Identity could also refer to how a human positions themselves and how they are positioned by other people. Identity is a position matter, not an essential matter, where position is influenced by self-awareness and socio-cultural interaction with others.

Therefore, a person’s identity has a liquid characteristic.

2 METHODS

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach that was able to describe and collect the research data in a more profound way, which could lead to new research findings in the field. The most important aspect of this method is the desire to understand a meaning within the informant’s data (Neumann, 2003). This research used a semi-structured interview and the snowball method to gain more in-depth and meaningful data. It enabled the researcher to have an interaction with the *Priawan* along with acquiring historical details and knowledge of the *Priawan*’s personal life experience.

Creswell (2014) said that when conducting research with the qualitative method, the researcher should determine the location as the research object, which is the place where the informants do the interaction. The informants in this research were people who identified themselves as male transgender individuals who self-identified as *Priawan*. We interviewed five *Priawan*, consisting of three *Priawan* in Jakarta and two in Surabaya.

The steps conducted in the data collection were as follows: 1) the researcher contacted the informants and stated the research purpose, as it is necessary to receive a research permit and the informants’ recommendations to help them to further conduct the research. This also helped them to obtain interviews with organisations that engage in LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) advocacy in Jakarta and Surabaya. 2) The researcher distributed the questionnaire and provided information on how to fill it in to the informants. 3) The informants were given a couple of minutes to ensure that they understood and to allow them to fill the questionnaire. 4) After the researcher received the questionnaire back from the informants, the researcher then conducted more in-depth interviews to obtain the fullest meaning from their answers as well as the historical aspects.

3 RESULTS

Indonesia has experienced rapid growth regarding economics and the population in South East Asia. It is generating development and growth in its

provincial cities, which has classified them as New World Class Metropolitan Cities. Jakarta is the capital city of Indonesia and Surabaya is the second biggest city in Indonesia; both have a diverse population along with a variety of gender identities. The increase of transgender issues nowadays is influencing people to get to know more about gender identity. *Priawan* in Jakarta and Surabaya refers to transgender individuals where their biological sex is not the same as their gender cognition.

Table 1. *Priawan* Respondent

PRIAWAN	AJ	BJ	CJ	AS	BS
AGE	AGE 30	AGE 33	AGE 36	AGE 27	AGE 31
SELF AWARENESS					
UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THEMSELVES > 5 YEARS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
INTERESTED WITH WOMAN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
INTERESTED WITH MAN	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
DRESS UP LIKE A WOMAN	No	No	No	No	No
DRESS UP LIKE A MAN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ACCEPT THEIR WOMAN'S BODY PART	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ACTS LIKE A MAN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
MENSTRUAL CYCLE: DISTURBED OR NOT	Disturbed	Disturbed	Disturbed	Disturbed	Disturbed
SOCIAL INTERACTION					
SUITABLE INTERACTION WITH WOMAN VOICE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
COMFORTABLE TO BE CALLED 'MAS' OR 'KAKAK'	Mas	Mas	Mas	Mas	Mas
ACCEPTED BY INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FAMILY	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
COMFORTABLE IN THE OFFICE WITH MAN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
COMFORTABLE MEETING WITH COUSIN	No	No	No	No	No
PERFORM RELIGIOUS WORSHIP IN MALE OR FEMALE	MALE	MALE	MALE	MALE	MALE
RECEIVE DISCRIMINATION IN DOCUMENT ADMINISTRATION	No	No	No	No	No

Table 1 above shows, in the self-awareness column, whether or not the *Priawan* is interested in being with men or not. There were different answers from the different participants. For instance, BJ (age 36) from Jakarta and AS (age 27) from Surabaya both stated that they were interested in men, while the other three *Priawan* were interested in women. All of the *Priawan* experience disturbances in their menstruation cycle. In the social interaction column, for all points, all of the *Priawan* have similar performances and behaviour. Butler (1990) described how the gender and sexuality production is displayed through desire, gestures and acts, which generates the necessary implications on their gender identity.

4 DISCUSSION

The American post-structuralist philosopher, Judith P. Butler, wrote a famous queer theory book called ‘Gender Trouble’ (1990). This work received widespread attention because it introduced the theory of performance to gender and sexuality. For Butler, there is no genuine gender identity; it is all formed through repeated expressions and performance until it is better established. Part of Butler’s theory is performativity, as written in his Gender Trouble book. He rejects the principle of an identity that has a beginning and an end. From this

standpoint, it can be understood that according to Butler's view, someone could have masculine and feminine identities at the same time or at different times, similar to feminine men or masculine women. This situation has an impact on the issue of sexual orientation. If a person's sexual identity is not final and is unstable, therefore there should be no finality to a man liking a man and vice versa. However, society certainly does not want and approve of such situations. As mentioned above, personal identity is shaped through culture and its discourse, where there are rules that are propagated through repetition.

According to Butler, the performance concept could be developed further, which relates to gender identity. He argues that the formation of individual identity happens in a performative way through discourse. Gender identity is an effect that is produced by a person because they show various practices and behaviour, which is called a gender act. This gender act is socially agreed on and understandable, and serves as an identity sign as to whether they are male or female.

Waria (female-looking men) have been studied by Butler. In his study, they should perform a series of specific procedures and practices in order to obtain the idealised form of appearance and gestures that are considered feminine. According to Butler, this practice is so then transwoman not only imitate the femininity of women, but also show that femininity is an imitation practice, whether it is conducted by transwomen or by ciswomen themselves. In short, the determinant of the realness effect is the ability to produce a naturalised impact (Butler, 1993)

Therefore, it can be underlined that transwomen are not imitating real women. Instead, they provide an understanding and inspiration. There is no originality, only layers of performance which is considered to be a natural form. These practices also parody the traditional assumptions about so-called masculinity and femininity. If the person has a penis, then they do not need to act or be masculine. Similarly, people who have a vagina do not need to act feminine. "...the notion of original or primary gender identity is ... parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylisation of butch/femme identities ..." (Butler, 1990).

5 CONCLUSION

The conclusion is that the gender identity of *Priawan* is where the individual has a female biological condition but their cognition of themselves is male. They have realised this since they were children; they feel uncomfortable having a female biological state and find it more comfortable to socialise and do activities with boys. However, they still often interested in women as their sexual orientation. The *Priawan* in Jakarta and Surabaya enjoy their body being female and their cognition being male.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to thank *Priawan* in Jakarta and Surabaya who are willing to support and provide useful information for this research.

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