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**Tom Boellstorff: The Gay Archipelago**

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## Introduction

### TO YOU WHO HAVE OPENED THIS BOOK

If you have opened this book hoping for a traveler's tale in gay Indonesia, you may be disappointed. Yet I hope you will do more than skip ahead to the stories I tell. While I love a good story as much as anyone else, I also realize that we live in a time where the numbing reduction of debate to sound bites reflects a deep-seated hostility to asking the hard questions. Some readers may find this book refreshingly free of jargon; others may find it full of jargon. While it's difficult to please everyone, I have tried to write the most accessible book I can while remaining true to the following conviction: we are most human when we reflect upon the ways of thinking that constitute the very stuff of which our lives are made.

This book is written primarily to be read by cultural anthropologists—not the folks who dig up bones or reassemble ancient pottery, but those who hang out with contemporary peoples to learn about their ways of thinking and living. However, even if you are not typically interested in the theories of contemporary cultural anthropology (I just call this “anthropology” in this book), I hope you might find that wrestling with the intellectual issues I bring up can be as rewarding as good stories and can provide a better understanding of gay and lesbian life. For instance, while discussing the kinds of sex gay men have with each other in Indonesia might seem important (and I do discuss this), it turns out to be just as important to discuss how we in the West decide when two things are “different” or “the same.”

Although this is not a short book, it represents only about half of the material I have published thus far on the gay archipelago. Additional articles analyze dimensions of gay and lesbian life touched upon only briefly in this book, reinforcing many points I make (the key articles are Boellstorff 1999, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2004e). I indicate where these additional articles might be useful.

Every word of this book is written knowing that it may someday be translated into Indonesian. For such a future Indonesian audience, my hopes are the same as for my English-speaking audience: an appreciation for the lives of gay and lesbian Indonesians, and an appreciation for the value of stepping back from tantalizing impressions of the everyday to

ask how human social relations come to be, are sustained, and change over time. The title “The Gay Archipelago” is obviously not meant to imply that all Indonesians are gay, but that there is a gay archipelago that lies amidst the national archipelago. My use of “archipelago” in this book has no relation to the notion of “the gulag archipelago” used by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn with reference to the former Soviet Union (Solzhenitsyn 1973)—a use of “archipelago” indexing a different form of state power, and a history of which my Indonesian interlocutors were unaware.

I do not recommend policies or provide solutions in this book. Solutions are important, but the rush to solutions can be part of the problem. Solutions are helpful, but in an important way they are boring: they close doors and silence debates. While I care about finding answers and often work as an activist, for this book I am more interested in asking new questions, questions that could point toward new visions of social justice.

#### TERMS OF DISCUSSION

In a classic essay, Clifford Geertz identified the goal of anthropology as “a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view” (1983:68). Nowadays, however, details can be global—and structure local—as much as the other way around. In the same essay Geertz wrote about the situation in his field site—near Surabaya, one of the primary field sites of this book—by saying it was characterized in the 1950s by a “curious mixture of borrowed fragments of modernity and exhausted relics of tradition” (60). In the contemporary moment, however, neither cultural transformation nor ethnographic interpretation can be understood as “continuous dialectical tacking” or “curious mixtures.” New understandings of imbrication and transfer are needed. Geertz, like myself, was writing of Indonesia, a nation that has long served as an important laboratory for social theory in anthropology. Indonesia can now highlight changing forms of social life in an era of globalization.

For some time now Westerners have tended to think they live in a world that is already globalized. From the perspective of *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (Friedman 2000) or *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2001) to the global war on terror, there seems to be no corner of the Earth that remains untouched, as if the most “isolated native” drinks Coca-Cola or knows of those who do. The idea that those whom anthropologists studied were ever truly isolated was a fantasy (after all, anthropologists were there to study them). However, the trope of distance and otherness persists not just in anthropology but in the social sciences and beyond. It encodes

a set of assumptions about the production of knowledge (knowledge is knowledge of *difference*) and the nature of human being (culture is, in the end, *local*).

In this book I offer *dubbing culture* as a metaphor for conceptualizing contemporary globalizing processes, ethnographic practice in an already globalized world, and the homologies between these projects of interpretation and reconfiguration. Where “writing culture” called attention to the possibility of a reflexive anthropology that decentered ethnographic authority (Clifford and Marcus 1986), “dubbing culture” suggests a post-reflexive anthropology that decenters the ethnographic project itself. “Dubbing” undermines the empiric of ethnography, predicated as it is on the authentic. The term “dubbing culture” is my own invention, but it draws upon a late 1990s controversy in Indonesia where the dubbing of Western television shows was banned on the grounds that if Westerners appeared to speak Indonesian in the mass media, Indonesians would no longer be able to tell where their culture ends and authentic Indonesian culture begins.

Surfing the boundary between emic and etic, I use this term to investigate the surprising resonances between the dubbing controversy and how some Indonesians come to think of themselves in terms of the Indonesian words *gay* and *lesbi*. More generally, “dubbing culture” provides a rubric for rethinking globalization without relying on biogenetic (and, arguably, heteronormative) metaphors like hybridity, creolization, and diaspora, which imply prior unities and originary points of dispersion. In dubbing culture, two elements are held together in productive tension without the expectation that they will resolve into one—just as it is known from the outset that the speaker’s lips will never be in synch with the spoken word in a dubbed film. “Dubbing culture” is queer: with dubbing, there can never be a “faithful” translation. It is like the relationship between voice and image in a dubbed film or television show: each element articulates a different language, yet they are entangled into a meaningful unit. It is a relationship more intimate than dialogue, but more distinct than monologue. While I intend the concept of dubbing culture to be broadly relevant, it is particularly salient with regard to gay and lesbian Indonesians because their sexualities are so self-evidently novel—in comparison to, say, “heterosexuality” in Indonesia or the West, which is no less a product of the times but is often misrecognized as natural, eternal, and unchanging.

This book is about gay and lesbian lives in Indonesia—the fourth most populous nation after India, China, and the United States—and what these lives imply for overlapping fields of inquiry including queer theory, Southeast Asia studies, mass media studies, globalization studies, postcolonial theory, and anthropology. Yet this book is an ethnography of sexual “subject positions,” not persons per se, and is only occasionally about

the Indonesian gay and lesbian political “movement,” which is important but not indicative of how gay and lesbian lives are typically lived. I am interested in the social categories *gay* and *lesbi* not just because they are remarkable but because to Western eyes they can appear so mundane. I explore how these social categories have come into being, how they transform ostensibly Western concepts of homosexuality, and how they are taken up and lived in the Indonesian context. My data come largely from individual lives, and throughout I discuss the agency, freedom, and choice in how Indonesians negotiate their subjectivities within systems of power. Yet these systems of power create the preconditions for “agency” in the first place—a term that (alongside “freedom,” “choice,” and “negotiate”) reveals more about Western ideologies of the autonomous self than the lived dynamics of selfhood. Too often discussions of agency assume structures of power against individual “negotiation,” losing sight of how agency is also a transindividual social fact. A postreflexive anthropology must destabilize the figure of the preculturally agentive person that robs the ethnographic enterprise of its ability to investigate the relationship between the social and the subjective.

As someone originally trained as a linguist, I find anxieties over agency quite odd. I can, at will and as often as I please, create a well-formed sentence never before produced in the history of the English language—“I saw a black cat look strangely at an excited mouse near Redondo Avenue.” Yet I cannot invent new grammars at will; my speech takes place within a horizon of language. Similarly, my agency is produced through (not “constrained by”) culture. The linguistic metaphor has proven useful in addressing issues of postcoloniality: “a key question in the world of postcolonial scholarship will be the following. The problem of capitalist modernity cannot any longer be seen simply as a sociological problem of historical transition . . . but as a problem of translation, as well” (Chakrabarty 2000:17; see also Liu 1999). Dubbing, a translation that revels in its inevitable failure (moving lips that will *never* match the sounds of speech), opens up new ways to conceptualize relationships of similitude and difference when new incommensurabilities make “the stakes of translation seem high” (Povinelli 2002:321).

This book’s starting point is the apparent puzzle of Indonesians who use the terms *gay* and *lesbi* in at least some contexts of their lives, yet consider these to be “authentically Indonesian” (*asli Indonesia*) ways of being. Under conditions ranging from grudging tolerance to open bigotry—but characterized above all by a society that does not know they exist—Indonesians reach halfway across the world to appropriate these terms, transforming them through practices of daily life to interpret apparently “local” experiences. It is *always* clear to Indonesians of any ethnic or

religious background that the terms *gay* and *lesbi* do not originate in locality or tradition.

However, in contrast to stereotypes of the elite, cosmopolitan homosexual, most gay and lesbian Indonesians are not rich or even middle class. Few of them speak English or have traveled outside Indonesia. Rarely have they had sex with, or even encountered, a gay or lesbian Westerner. Most have never seen Western lesbian or gay publications, nor have they read published materials produced by other gay and lesbian Indonesians. While concepts have moved to and from what is now called Indonesia for millennia, this has typically been enabled by linkages to institutional structures, as in the cases of world religions (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism), colonialism, capitalism, and nationalism. But no religious authority, state bureaucracy, or transnational corporation intentionally globalizes *gay* and *lesbi*: in this case concepts appear to move in the absence of an institutional framework. Importantly, what they move to is the nation-state of Indonesia, rather than specific islands or ethnic groups. *Gay* and *lesbi* are national in character; this is why national belonging appears alongside globalization as a focus of my analysis. For gay and lesbian Indonesians *understand their social worlds in national rather than simply global terms*—in surprising but often implicit accordance with the government’s “archipelago concept,” which represents Indonesia as an archipelago of diversity in unity. They dub this nationalist discourse in unexpected ways. This is why I use the term “cultural logics” (of being a gay or lesbian Indonesian) more often than “discourses,” since discourses are typically understood to be intentionally produced by powerful institutions.

Thus, alongside the concept of dubbing culture, a key theoretical intervention of this book is to think through the implications of *archipelagic subjectivities and socialities*, which do not hew to continental imaginaries of clear borders embracing contiguous territories. The archipelago metaphor permits understanding selfhood and sociality as not possessing sharp external boundaries, yet characterized by islands of difference. I examine how *gay* and *lesbi* are founded on rhetorics of national belonging based upon the figure of the heterosexual nuclear family—paradoxical as that may seem from the vantage point of Western homosexualities (and scholarship on the nexus of ethnicity, race, class, gender, and sexuality). How is one to understand senses of selfhood that connect and confound traditional social scientific levels of analysis (and, arguably, lived experience in the West) such as local, regional, national, and global?

This book examines a wide range of sexualities and genders, many of which have different names in different parts of Indonesia or even within one area. As a result I employ several terminological conventions. These conventions are a campy sendup of social scientific obsessions with find-

ing the “right words” to label “things” assumed to exist in the social world independent of the observer. For instance, from this point onward I consistently italicize the Indonesian terms *gay* and *lesbi* to indicate they are distinct from English “gay” and “lesbian.” I also italicize *normal*, an Indonesian term that refers to dominant understandings of modern sexuality. I wish to underscore that while *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians reterritorialize the concepts “gay” and “lesbian,” the terms have their own history and dynamics: they are not just “gay” and “lesbian” with a foreign accent. In italicizing these terms I use a graphic device to hold them at arm’s length, defamiliarizing them while highlighting that they are lived concepts, not just analytical conveniences.

This is important because many a work in sexuality and gender studies congratulates itself for, and frets about, “discovering” that terms like homosexual, lesbian, gay, or even sexuality and gender, cannot explain non-Western contexts. This concern (which “dubbing culture” will destabilize) has a long history, which Geertz can again summarize for us:

The history of anthropology has in large part consisted in taking concepts put together in the West (“religion,” “family,” “class,” “state”), trying to apply them in non-Western contexts, finding that they fit there rather badly at best, laboring to rework them so that they fit rather better, and then discovering in the end that, however reworked, many of the problems they pose—the nature of belief, the foundations of obligation, the inequality of life chances, the legitimacy of domination—remain clearly recognizable, quite alive. (C. Geertz 1990:77)

Claiming that concepts like “homosexual,” “sexuality,” and “gender” fail to explain non-Western realities misleadingly implies that the concepts are adequate in the West. It confuses modes of argumentation, mistaking interpretive frameworks for authoritative typologies. It also makes it difficult to examine how what Geertz terms “concepts put together in the West” are increasingly “put together” in non-Western contexts prior to the ethnographic encounter. Ethnographic objects that collapse the emic/etic distinction force crucial questions regarding globalization, similitude, and difference.

For this reason I am interested in intersectional theories of sexuality; that is, theories of sexuality that understand sexuality to be formed at the conjuncture of multiple cultural logics. This interest in intersectionality arises from my understanding of *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians, but it also arises from a sensitivity to my position as a gay white man: my own cultural background predisposes me to see sexuality as a singular domain and “coming out” as movement along a single dimension. I would argue that the very idea of sexuality requires a disavowal of other domains, particularly gender and race—indeed, that the drawing of a line around a subset of human experience and calling it “sexuality” is a foundational

moment permitting the exclusion of gender and race. I therefore see a danger in the very idea of “sexual culture,” which encodes an assumption that sexuality has an independent cultural logic, rather than existing at the intersection of multiple discourses. The theoretical architecture I develop in this book is concerned with disrupting these tendencies of the category “sexuality.”

In this book the category “*lesbi* women” includes not only feminine women but masculine women who in some cases think of themselves as women with men’s souls. Both feminine and masculine *lesbi* women sometimes call themselves *lesbi*, but there are other terms.<sup>1</sup> In much of Indonesia, including parts of Java and Sumatra, *lesbi* women use *cewek* (which in colloquial Indonesian means “female”) as a term for feminine *lesbi* women (Blackwood 1999). In this book I use *cewek* as a catch-all term for feminine *lesbi* women anywhere in Indonesia. Masculine *lesbi* women are known by a range of names, including *hunter* in southern Sulawesi and parts of Java, *cowok* (male) in parts of Sumatra, the Bugis term *calalai* in southern Sulawesi, and *butchie* and *sentul* in parts of Java. Across Indonesia these persons are also known as *tomboi* (occasionally spelled *tomboy* or *thomboy*); in this book I use *tomboi* as a catch-all term for masculine *lesbi* women regardless of whether the person in question uses *tomboi*, *hunter*, or *lesbi* or does not have a name for their sexual and gendered subjectivity. I use *lesbi* as an overarching term.<sup>2</sup> I refer to male-to-female transvestites (best known by the term *banci*) as *warias*, the term they prefer. In the past I have referred to both *warias* and *tombois* as *s/he* (the Indonesian third-person singular pronoun *dia* is gender neutral). While such novel pronouns can be useful, I have come to believe that they are too exoticizing and reflect a theory of language in which “words” and “things” ideally have a one-to-one correspondence. As a result, in this book I refer to *warias* as “she” and *tombois* as “he,” knowing, as they do, that social gender is productively imprecise.

I use the term “the West” ironically, with the understanding that “I refer to the effects of hegemonic representations of the Western self rather than its subjugated traditions” (Gupta 1998:36). “West” should be read as if always within scare quotes. For instance, the idea of “gay and lesbian Westerners” refers to dominant Western discourses of homosexuality, precisely the ones that would seem to be most capable of globalizing, and intentionally does not account for the great diversity in sexual and gendered regimes in the West. For *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians, the United States is typically the West’s exemplar, but the West can include Australia and even Japan. That Westernness has a long history of slippage in the archipelago is indicated by the fact that the Indonesian term for “west,” *barat*, comes from the Sanskrit and now Hindi word for India (*bharat*), the West’s “Orient.”

## SUBJECTIVITY AND SEXUALITY

In this book I eschew the identity-behavior binarism in favor of a language of *subject positions* (extant social categories of selfhood) and *subjectivities* (the various senses of self—erotics, assumptions about one's life course, and so forth—that obtain when occupying a subject position, whether partially or completely, temporarily or permanently). Focusing on subject positions and subjectivities turns attention to the total social fact of *gay* and *lesbi* selfhood. This is a basically Foucauldian framework that draws from the epistemological break between volumes 1 and 2 of *The History of Sexuality* (1978, 1985), wherein Foucault shifted from an emphasis on the “systems of power” inciting sexuality to “the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being” (1985:4–5).

I do not think that the notion of identity is useless, just that with regard to the topics of this book it is a poor fit. I think of “subject position” as a rough translation of *jiwa*, which means “soul” but often has a collective meaning: *lesbi* women will sometimes say “*lesbi* have the same *jiwa*”; *warias* will sometimes say they “have the same *jiwa*”; or *lesbi* women and *gay* men will sometimes say they share a *jiwa*. I think of “subjectivity” as a rough translation of *pribadi* or *jati diri*, both of which mean approximately “self-conception”; a *gay* man once distinguished *pribadi* from *jiwa* by saying that “every person possesses their own *pribadi*.” *Identitas* has a much more experience-distant, bureaucratic ring for most Indonesians: one *gay* man defined *identitas* as “biodata: name, address, and so on.”

This framework of subject positions and subjectivities is how I flesh out a social constructionist theory of sexuality. My understanding of the human condition is that it is not possible to have subjectivities without subject positions. Phrases like “biological *basis*” or “biological *foundation*” for sexuality are misleading. Language again provides a convenient example. There is undoubtedly a biological human capacity to acquire language, and language universals (for instance, plurality). However, no one speaks “Language”: people speak Chinese, English, or Indonesian, cultural and historical entities for which no gene will ever be found. The biological capacity for language is not ontologically prior to these historically and culturally contextual practices of speaking. We have been biologically designed not to be biologically designed, to be “incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture—and not through culture in general but through highly particular forms of it” (C. Geertz 1973:49). The million dollar question, then, is this: Is

being male or female, gay or straight, more like “Chinese” or “Language”? The scientific evidence supports the contention that social facts like sexuality and gender are more like “Chinese” than “Language,” and thus that claims of a biological “basis” for sexuality or gender engage in a category mistake, confusing an analytical category for an experiential one. Sexualities (*gay*, *lesbi*, gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, a “man who has sex with men”), indeed all subject positions, are like English or Chinese, not “Language”—products of history and culture.

Subject positions can be occupied in myriad ways (“teenager,” for instance, can be occupied antagonistically as a rebel, or normatively as a “good student”). Construing subject positions as multiply inhabitable provides a way to conceptualize agency without interpreting the metaphor of social construction volitionally—deploying verbs of concerted, self-aware action like “negotiation” to posit a sexual self that stands outside culture.

This is primarily a study of “sexuality,” however problematized. I often use phrases like “gender and sexuality” to highlight how for *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians, gender and sexuality are mutually defining. Yet on some level this is redundant, since sexuality is always defined in terms of gender, nation, race, class, and a host of other social categories. I thus respectfully disagree with my colleagues who claim that the analytical distinction between gender and sexuality (most famously set out in Rubin 1984) is flawed because it is not possible to conceptually separate gender and sexuality. First, it is obviously possible to separate them in certain contexts, and this is not simply a product of academic debates or globalization (as the distinction between *gay* and *waria* in Indonesia indicates). Second, a division between gender and race, or sexuality and race, or race and class, and so on ad infinitum, is also not conceptually possible on some level, yet on another level it is not only possible but enormously useful on theoretical and political grounds. In the end, everything is connected to everything, but this insight is of limited use. The danger lies not in conceptually separating cultural domains, but in ontologizing such separations so that the foundationally intersectional character of social life, and social inequality, becomes obscured.

Throughout this book I employ a relational analysis with regard to gender and sexuality. I focus on *gay* men but also address *lesbi* women, male-to-female transvestites (*warias*), female-to-male transgenders (*tombois*), and so-called traditional homosexualities and transgenderisms. Male transvestites are well known to the Indonesian public, often by the rather derogatory terms *banci* or *béncong*. They are visible in Indonesian society to a degree that has no parallel in the West, and that continually surprises

Western visitors. Yet this visibility does not translate directly into acceptance: warias are acknowledged, but to a great extent acknowledged as inferior. I will at various points describe waria life as it shapes the *gay* and *lesbi* subject positions (see Boellstorff 2004b for a more detailed discussion of warias).

Like *gay* men, *lesbi* women can be found throughout Indonesia. In fact, there appears to have been greater mass media coverage of *lesbi* women than *gay* men when these subject positions began appearing on the national scene in the early 1980s, but this is probably an artifact of the greater scrutiny placed on women's sexuality more generally. As in the case of *gay* men, *lesbi* women can come from any class position. Since they usually come to their sexual subjectivities through mainstream mass media, as *gay* men do, it is not necessary that they be members of feminist organizations, have a high level of education, or live in the capital of Jakarta. There are many other similarities between *gay* men and *lesbi* women. Both usually describe their desires in terms of a desire for the same, and both the *gay* and *lesbi* subject positions are found nationwide. Historically, *gay* and *lesbi* appear to have taken form more or less together, as gendered analogues, suggesting the (sometimes fulfilled) possibility of socializing between *gay* men and *lesbi* women.

Although the bulk of my fieldwork has been among *gay* men and warias, I have spent a good deal of time with *lesbi* Indonesians. This presents me with a dilemma. I wish to particularize my discussion when it could be misunderstood as falsely universalizing to the experiences of *lesbi* women. Yet I also do not wish to footnote my *lesbi* material (Braidotti 1997); such a move would be not only methodologically suspect (given the importance of gender relationality) but politically unsound, given that *lesbi* Indonesians often identify isolation as an important issue. This dilemma is not simply due to the fact that as a man, spending time with women was more difficult: no researcher ever has equal access to all social groups within a particular field site. My path of compromise is to weave together my material on *gay* men and *lesbi* women, paying attention to points of both similarity and divergence and calibrating my work with existing scholarship on *lesbi* women. When my interpretations apply only to *gay* men, I refer only to them. When speaking of *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians together, I always use “*gay* and *lesbi*” (rather than alternating between “*gay* and *lesbi*” and “*lesbi* and *gay*”) to underscore that I have more data on *gay* men than *lesbi* women. This is also why this book is entitled *The Gay Archipelago* rather than *The Gay and Lesbi Archipelago*. This relational rather than monogendered approach is not a dreaded concession but a theoretical necessity: “the tendency to ignore imbalances in order to permit a grasp of women's lives has led too many scholars to

forget that men and women ultimately live together in the world and, so, that we will never understand the lives that women lead without relating them to men” (Rosaldo 1980:396).

#### FIRST PRELUDE: INDEPENDENCE DAY

Indonesia celebrates its Independence Day every August 17, but to my knowledge the first time *gay* men celebrated Independence Day in their own world was in Surabaya on this night: Independence Day’s eve, August 16, 2004. I have come to a place *gay* men call “*Pattaya*.” It is named after the famed tourist beach in Thailand, a place most *gay* men have never seen but that is rumored to be full of *gay* men.<sup>3</sup> *Pattaya* in Thailand is a beach, but in Surabaya—Indonesia’s second largest city—*Pattaya* is a dark, narrow lane running along one side of the Brantas River, near a small dam right in the center of town, near a shopping mall, a major hotel, and a train station. Some of the city’s poor live along the sides of the lane in wood shacks, often without electricity, while others fish in the fetid waters of the river. On many nights over a hundred *gay* men stroll along the dark lane, hanging out and talking with friends while perched on the back of parked motorcycles, or (in the darkest “center” of *Pattaya*) stealing kisses from a lover.

This night I have come to the best-lit portion of *Pattaya* at 10:30 P.M., where the most “opened” *gay* men tend to congregate. There are about forty *gay* men and a handful of *warias* hanging out. Several men take a blue tarp and set it out on the pavement, and a few moments later a taxi makes its way precariously down the lane, which is only slightly wider than the taxi itself. A *gay* man exits the taxi with food: yellow rice sculpted into a little mountain, fish, chicken, vegetables—foods of a celebratory feast (*slametan*). A few nights ago 5,000 rupiah (about 50 cents) was gathered from each *gay* man at *Pattaya* to pay for this food.

Now we all sit down on the tarp, surrounding the food, and are silent as one of the participants begins to speak:

Okelah teman-teman, semua, selamat datang kembali ke *Pattaya* . . . Malam ini kita berkumpul-kumpulnya dengan maksud, yaitu untuk merayakan kemerdekaan pada besok . . . bukan untuk sendiri-sendiri . . . tapi kita maksud bahwa kita ada di tengah masyarakat . . . kita double, ya.

Okay friends, all of us, welcome back to *Pattaya* . . . This night we gather together in order to celebrate our independence [day] tomorrow . . . not for ourselves . . . but we mean that we are in the midst of society . . . we are double, yes.

Then we close our eyes as someone else leads us in prayer: “let us pray for the souls of the heroes who have fallen for us.” For these moments of prayer and remembrance, for the sake of Independence Day, *gay* men try to bring together what they call “the *gay* world” and “the *normal* world.” And in this intersection, this failed intersection, they articulate the idea that their lives are “double.”

Yet the linkages between being *gay* and the Indonesian nation go back much further than August 16, 2004.

*Setting:* Makassar, capital of South Sulawesi province on the island of Sulawesi (Celebes). *Place:* the waterfront. *Time:* August 17, 2000, Indonesia’s fifty-fifth anniversary. Two years ago, the downfall of the dictator Soeharto had brought new possibilities and dangers.

It is in this uncertain context that the citizens of Makassar now celebrate Independence Day afternoon. The city of over a million people sits along Sulawesi’s western coastline, looking out toward Borneo two hundred miles away. On this day the city has closed off the road running along the waterfront and set up a raised stage on one end; the normally traffic-filled street has become a walkway for hundreds. It is hot, and by midafternoon everyone is wilted. From the stage comes an announcement about a boat race; the speaker is a Dutch man who has been living in Makassar for some time. Afterwards a “traditional” drumming group performs. The music throbs in the humid air, but only a few Indonesians sit on the blistering pavement in front of the stage. Most crouch at the edge of the road taking shelter underneath makeshift tents, sipping cool sodas and trying to bear the heat.

That, however, is about to change, as the drummers end their performance and an Indonesian emcee takes the stage. He says: “Now, on this anniversary of our independence, we present to you a skit about AIDS by the group ‘Sulawesi Style.’” A pregnant pause, and suddenly American teen pop sensation Britney Spears’ international hit “Baby One More Time” fills the air. Fifteen members of Sulawesi Style take the stage wearing junior high school uniforms; they will soon present a skit in which a substitute teacher explains AIDS to her students. In this opening number, however, they dance in formation. These dancers are *gay* men, but for this performance about half are in drag. Karim, one of the most charismatic, moves quickly to the catwalk in front of the stage. His long black wig flowing in the ocean breeze, Karim struts toward the audience, hips marking the beat, lip-synching Britney flawlessly with arms outstretched, as if to take in the multitudes watching him. Multitudes? Where a few tired eyes watched the drummers minutes earlier, hundreds now pack the street to watch Sulawesi Style’s performance. The heat is forgotten as adults, teenagers, even small kids scream with delight, pointing at the



Figure 1–1. An Independence Day performance. Author’s photograph.

drag performers and dancing along; mothers in Muslim headscarves clap along, pushing their kids closer to the stage to see. The street has become a big party and Karim is the center, standing over the crowd in all his drag glory.

I climb the stairs next to the stage to snap the picture reproduced as figure 1–1: the masses of onlookers smiling in approval, Karim at the end of the catwalk, one leg crossed in front of the other as he sashays to the edge, framed against a shining blue sky meeting shining blue sea. Stepping down from the stage, I happen to walk by the Dutch man who introduced the boat races. Understandably he assumes I am a tourist who has wandered into the crowd; I guess this is why he feels compelled to pull me aside and inform me that “Here, it’s not like with our culture. Here transvestites are magicians and healers.” Of course, these are not transvestites, magicians, or healers, but *gay* men who hang out in the shopping mall and dress most of the time in jeans and tee-shirts. What challenges me this Independence Day is not difference but similitude: *gay* men lip-synching an American pop star. The audience believes this is just a show; they are not “accepting *gay* men.” Yet I cannot imagine a Fourth of July where devoutly religious families would find this to be great entertainment for

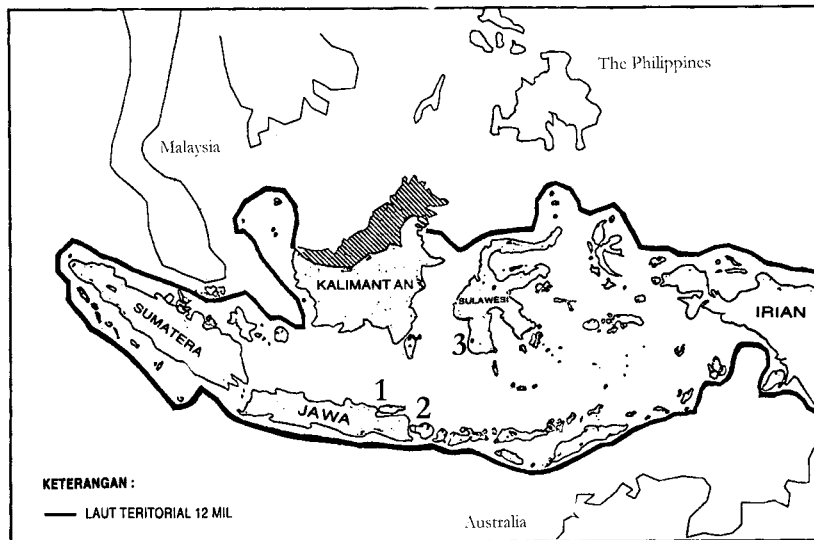


Figure 1–2. Map of Indonesia (before East Timor’s independence). Most Western maps of Indonesia do not include the external border defined by the archipelago concept (black line). Numbers indicate the location of (1) the city of Surabaya, (2) the island of Bali, and (3) the city of Makassar. Lembaga Ketahanan Nasional (1995:17).

a holiday afternoon, where men in drag help to recall the independence of a nation in a state of crisis and change.

#### LOCATIONS

This book’s archipelagic analysis will challenge the concept of boundary, which “is one of the least subtle in the social science literature” (Strathern 1996:520). The boundary determining which islands are part of Indonesia is not a geographic given: like constellations, archipelagos are networks, constituted through lines of connection. Indonesia occupies the world’s largest archipelago, stretching over 3,977 miles (fig. 1–2). It is comprised of about 17,000 islands, about 6,000 of which are inhabited. (Note that all images of the archipelago in this book include East Timor as part of Indonesia; my fieldwork took place before and after East Timor’s independence, but the archipelago concept began to be promulgated before East Timor’s independence in 2002.) With about 230 million inhabitants and 670 ethnic groups, approximately nine-tenths of whom follow Islam, Indonesia is home to more Muslims than any other nation. Lying across trade routes that for centuries have linked East Asia with the Indian

subcontinent, the Arab world, and Europe, this archipelago is anything but remote.

The imagined boundary delineating Indonesia does not correspond to any “traditional” polity or culture: it is inherited from the colonial encounter. The Dutch were the dominant power in this region from the 1600s until ousted by the Japanese at the beginning of World War II. The Dutch discouraged knowledge of their language beyond civil and domestic servants, and at independence less than 2 percent of Indonesians spoke Dutch (Anderson 1990:138, 197; Groeneboer 1998:1; Siegel 1997:13). In place of a European language, the Dutch communicated primarily through Malay, an Austronesian language that had been used for centuries in island Southeast Asia as a trade language. By the 1920s, nationalist groups had formed in the colony. While a few framed themselves in ethnic terms (such as *Jong Java* or “the young Javanese”), by the time of the “Youth Pledge” of 1928 nationalist sentiments were predicated on the assumption that independence was to be for the citizens of the archipelago, sharing a new quasi-ethnicity—indeed, an ethnocitizenship—as Indonesian; speaking Malay, renamed “Indonesian,” as the national tongue.

Indonesia knew only two presidents during its first half-century as an independent nation. The first, Sukarno, worked for over twenty years to hold the young nation together in the context of communist and Islamic mass movements, conflicts in the military, and regional separatism. Getting citizens of the new nation to think of themselves as Indonesians first, and members of ethnic groups second, became a central goal of the post-colonial state. Sukarno’s forceful anti-Western rhetoric and role in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement helped sustain his rule until economic and political paralysis culminated in the bloody events of 1965–67, when an attempted coup and the murder of six generals provided a pretext for then-Major General Soeharto to seize power and eliminate the Indonesian Communist Party: it is estimated that over half a million people died.

Sukarno’s rule was followed by the so-called New Order of Soeharto, which lasted until 1998. During this time, the period in which the *gay* and *lesbi* subject positions took form, development (*pembangunan*) replaced revolution (*revolusi*) as state keyword. The idea of national integration was intensified and redeployed through state ideologies, including the archipelago concept (*wawasan nusantara*) and family principle (*azas kekeluargaan*). Corruption and resistance to authoritarianism, as well as the social misery caused by the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis, forced Soeharto to step down in May 1998. The post-Soeharto “era of reform” (*era reformasi*) has seen unprecedented press freedoms and a resurgence of civil society. It has also seen a new visibility for political Islam, a rise in

separatist movements, and the reframing of national governance in terms of regional autonomy (*otonomi daerah*), with a corresponding “rise of the local” (Aspinall and Fealy 2003:2) that would appear to renaturalize anthropology’s own methodological and ontological emphasis on locality. Nonetheless, nationalism remains deeply felt by most Indonesians.

A central goal of this book is to examine how *gay* and *lesbi* subjectivities are linked to discourses of the nation. On one level this might seem obvious, since the concepts *gay* and *lesbi* are not accepted by local culture, but this is insufficient, since they are not accepted by national culture either. In contemporary Indonesia the concepts *gay* and *lesbi* remain poorly understood by most *normal* Indonesians, with the links between sexuality and nation largely obscured (S. Wieringa 2002:2). How can state ideology shape *gay* and *lesbi* sexualities the state never intended to incite?

In his famous 1871 definition, Tylor identified culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor 1958 [1871]:1). While later thinkers have questioned Tylor’s assumption that culture is a whole, what I find curious is his displacement of the question of belonging from culture to society. Tylor sees culture as acquired by “members of society” but does not ask how “societies” are bounded so that one person acquires one culture; another person, another. Recognized membership in society appears a priori. From the beginnings of anthropology, recognition has stood as precondition for culture, and the completion of recognition is belonging.

Given nationalism’s continuing importance, it may surprise readers unfamiliar with the anthropology of Indonesia that virtually no anthropologists consider “Indonesia” to be their field site. It is possible to argue that this book is the first ethnography of Indonesians (rather than an ethnography of Javanese, Dayak, Minangkabau, etc.).<sup>4</sup> The Indonesian absence in anthropological research is shaped by ethnocentricity (see chapter 2; Boellstorff 2002). I coin the term “ethnocentricity” to name a spatial scale where “ethnicity” and “locality” presume each other to such a degree that they become, in essence, a single concept. This mode of representation originated in the colonial encounter as a means of impeding the possibility of translocal spatial scales other than colonialism (in particular, nationalism and Islamic movements). As reified in the work of the Leiden school, “custom” (*adat*) was understood to belong not to the Indies as a whole but to groups framed in terms of the equation of ethnicity and place. This assumes culture is the property of “the Balinese,” “the Makassarese,” “the Javanese,” and so on. Although a large body of scholarship has denaturalized ethnocentricity, it remains influential: national culture is often treated as a force impacting local culture rather than the possible location of culture in its own right. Indonesianist anthropology has produced an ar-

chipelago of literatures keyed to an archipelago of unitary cultures, discrete units *secondarily* shaped by an “Indonesia” conflated with the political, the urban, the modern, and ultimately with the inauthentic.

If a goal of John Pemberton’s work (Pemberton 1994) is to demonstrate that the subject of Java is really a subject of “Java” (that is, that the notion of “Java” is a discursive formation, not a priori), my analysis works in reverse, seeking to erase the implicit scare quotes and show that the subject of “Indonesia” is a *subject of Indonesia*—amenable to an ethnographic analysis with strengths and weaknesses not fundamentally different from those found in ethnography conducted with reference to any other spatial scale. Ethnolocality marks this boundary between ruler and ruled and also between knower and known. In anthropological inquiry it became the “investigative modality” (Cohn 1996:5) demarcating the conceptual threshold between the ethnographic and the comparative. To the degree that ethnicity is understood in terms of kinship and reproduction, *heteronormativity also demarcates this threshold*. Can there be subject positions with spatial scales that are foundationally national, even if persons inhabiting such subject positions might consider themselves in terms of ethnolocality with respect to other aspects of their lives? Could one think of oneself, for instance, as “Madurese” with relation to conceptions of religion, but “Indonesian” with relation to sexuality?

The most radical theoretical and methodological intervention of this book is that I take Indonesia as an ethnographic unit of analysis. A queer reading of the category “Indonesian,” it is an *ethnography of Indonesians*, not of the Batak, Buginese, Madurese, or any other ethnolocalized group. Indeed, it often seems that political scientists and anthropologists study two different objects: “Indonesia” versus “local culture.” There is a theoretically sophisticated body of literature on Indonesian, the national language, as a language of the public and the translocal (e.g., J. Errington 1998, 2000; Keane 1997, 2003; Siegel 1986, 1997). Yet rarely in the corpus of Indonesianist anthropology is one reminded that Indonesian is the “mother tongue” of a growing percentage of Indonesians, learned alongside rather than subsequent to ethnolocalized tongues like Javanese or Balinese. Never to my knowledge is one reminded that millions of Indonesians (including some of my interlocutors) are functionally *monolingual* in Indonesian (Sneddon 2003:202, 205). It is not solely due to his upper-class status that Sakti, the *gay* protagonist of the hit 2004 film *Arisan!* (Nia diNata, director), speaks only Indonesian (and not also Batak, his family’s ethnolocal language).

Monolingual Indonesian-speakers are absent from the ethnographic record because they are inconceivable from the perspective of ethnolocality. They seem to belong to the archipelago but not to any of its component islands. The national motto of Indonesia is “unity in diversity,” but mono-

lingual Indonesian-speakers, like *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians, do not seem to have any “diversity,” only unity. They appear improper. Yet while I carry out fieldwork on multiple islands, I ultimately construe them as elements of a single “site.” Just as someone studying a city might work in several neighborhoods but consider her or his conclusions to be reflective of that city, so my fieldwork takes “Indonesia” as its subject. In one sense my research is an example of multisited fieldwork (Marcus 1995). Yet since I take the nation-state of Indonesia as the ethnographic unit of analysis, in a fundamental sense my research is neither multisited nor comparative; it is a “multi-sited ethnography in one place.”<sup>5</sup>

This book is based on twenty-two months of activism and fieldwork over a twelve-year time span, centered on a period from July 1997 to May 1998, with three periods of earlier work (1992, 1993, and 1995), as well as additional work in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2004. My knowledge of *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians is based on participant observation and other qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are not more micrological or localizing than quantitative ones; they illuminate different aspects of social life. When explaining this to students I tell the story of a quantitative researcher and a qualitative researcher who go to Japan to study the Japanese language. The quantitative researcher prepares a survey that can be distributed to a large, random sample, providing valuable data concerning, say, varieties of Japanese dialects. The qualitative researcher studies a far smaller sample; he or she could not learn every vocabulary item of Japanese, for instance, or every dialect. Yet through immersion in daily life this person could learn to *speak* Japanese: from a handful of individuals one can learn how to communicate with millions. Qualitative research can be effective in drawing out cultural logics that, like languages, are shared: it is an approach suited to the study of similitude. There is no necessary relationship between methods and spatial scale: it is not true that qualitative methods like ethnography are “more local” and quantitative methods “more global.” As globalization becomes seen as the new default state of affairs in the world, there is a real need for qualitative studies of the global.

The complexities of *gay* and *lesbi* life present further challenges to traditional ethnographic methodologies. Despite the fact that (since at least Leach’s *Political Systems of Highland Burma*) anthropologists question that cultures are integrated, there remains a strong sense that ethnography should portray a total way of life (Leach 1964). But there is no *gay* and *lesbi* village I could study: *gay* and *lesbi* worlds are fragmented, taking form in stolen moments in places like apartments and parks. It is not a community with the kinds of recognized leaders that anthropologists often rely upon for authoritative accounts. One reason I find the ethnographic vignette so useful in this book is that *gay* and *lesbi* lives are lived in vignettes.

Because *gay* and *lesbi* lives are so self-consciously not a product of locality, I decided to conduct research in three sites: Surabaya in East Java, Makassar (formerly Ujung Pandang) in South Sulawesi, and Bali. I chose these sites because they are relatively close to one another yet contrast in ethnic and religious makeup, degree of contact with non-Indonesians, and position in the Indonesian nation-state. I have also spent periods from a few days to a month in Jakarta, Kediri (East Java), Bandung (West Java), Yogyakarta, Samarinda (East Kalimantan), Balikpapan (East Kalimantan), and several rural sites in East Java and South Sulawesi.

With a population of over three million, my first site, Surabaya, is the capital of the province of East Java. Located on Java's north coast across a narrow strait from the island of Madura, it is a major port as well as a financial and commercial center. Predominantly Javanese and Muslim with a large Madurese community, there are also significant numbers of Javanese Christians, Christians from other ethnolocalized groups, and smaller numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and Confucians. Makassar, my second site, is the sixth-largest city in Indonesia, provincial capital of South Sulawesi and "gateway" to eastern Indonesia. Like Surabaya, it lies on the coast and has an active port. It has a reputation for conservative Islam. The Bugis and Makassarese are the dominant ethnolocalized groups. My third site is predominantly Hindu Bali: Denpasar (the capital, with a population of approximately 375,000), the Kuta/Legian/Seminyak tourist corridor in south Bali, and the Lovina/Singaraja tourist corridor on the north coast. Kuta, Legian, and Seminyak, on the western coast approximately seven miles south of Denpasar, were sleepy fishing villages until the 1970s, when tourism became dominant. It has remained so (Picard 1996), even after the 2002 bombing in Kuta.

Before beginning fieldwork, I expected to find fundamental differences in *gay* and *lesbi* subjectivity between these three sites. Surely Muslim, Christian, and Hindu *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians would differ, as would those in the tourist zones of Bali versus urban Makassar or Surabaya. However, I was continually confronted by similarity among my sites and across demographic variables. Such similarity challenges the theoretical apparatus of anthropology, attuned as it is to discovering difference.

Since being *gay* or *lesbi* is rarely linked to one's working life, my participant observation took place mostly in the evenings. With *gay* men this meant innumerable nights hanging out in parks, discos, or apartments; with *lesbi* women my socializing, like theirs, was largely in the more domestic environments of homes and apartments, but sometimes shopping malls and other semipublic spaces as well. My participant observation also gave me ample opportunity to explore the *normal* world; that is, the dominant, heteronormative ground of national popular culture and ethnolocalized "tradition" against which the *gay* and *lesbi* worlds are figured.

I was openly gay throughout my fieldwork; this certainly aided the process of becoming familiar with those I was studying, but it gave me no privileged access (a heterosexual ethnographer could have conducted this research, though of course not in the same way). I built up relationships (often friendships) with my interlocutors over a period of years, but since *gay* or *lesbi* persons often suddenly leave the *gay* or *lesbi* world because of marriage or migration within Indonesia, I lost contact with many interlocutors over time. During the day I would conduct interviews and type up fieldnotes from the previous evening's experiences. I also engaged in extensive HIV prevention as well as *gay* and *lesbi* rights work with non-governmental organizations. In addition to participant observation and interviews, I conducted focus groups with *gay* men in Surabaya and Makassar. I have also done extensive textual and archival research, involving everything from items of popular culture (newspaper articles, books, magazines, television and film) to materials produced by *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians themselves (Boellstorff 2004c).

One long-standing concern in ethnographic work concerns conscious explanation: "the Ethnographer has in the field . . . the duty before him of drawing up all the rules and regularities. . . . But these things, though crystallized and set, are nowhere explicitly *formulated*" (Malinowski 1922:11). This has also long been recognized as "the fundamental task the anthropologist concerned with gender and sexual orientation must take on: dealing with diversity while challenging the transparency of individual experience" (Lewin 1991:791). Only occasionally are the cultural logics explored in this book the topic of explicit commentary: *gay* men and *lesbi* women do not speak of "dubbing culture," and rarely do they talk about a *gay* archipelago. I see my task as an interpretive one that draws out largely implicit assumptions. I find that moving beyond conscious explanation gives me greater humility regarding my conclusions: an approach that constructs ethnographic authority by claiming "they say so-and-so is the case" can lead to a false sense of certainty.

A possible misconstrual of this study is in terms of scope: have I misidentified the viewpoint of a few politicized, intellectual, or wealthy *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians for Indonesians as a whole? My goal is to describe the most dominant conceptions of *gay* and *lesbi* subjectivity without implying that the possible ways of living a *gay* or *lesbi* life are thereby exhausted. After all, anthropologists write all the time of "the Javanese" or even "the Javanese of the southern neighborhoods of Kediri" with the understanding that they are not ascribing unanimity to those they study. To misinterpret my claims as more overarching would constitute a "confusion of closure with scale"; ethnocultural explanations of social phe-

nomena can be as totalizing as translocal ones (Gupta 1998:12). Maintaining that *gay* and *lesbi* persons are found throughout Indonesia is not the same thing as saying that they are found everywhere in Indonesia. Even in urban centers many Indonesians with same-gender desires remain unaware of the concepts *gay* and *lesbi*. The metaphor of the archipelago is useful here: there can be “islands” of *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians nationwide, yet also places “nearby” where *gay* and *lesbi* are not taken up as subjectivities.

I am often asked if those on the oppressed periphery see *gay* and *lesbi* in national terms. There are indeed persons in Aceh, Papua, and elsewhere who see themselves as *gay* or *lesbi* Indonesians, as well as many ethnic Chinese. This does not mean that there are not separatists who reject the idea that they are “Indonesian”; it means that there exist Acehnese and Papuan persons who, like some Javanese, Makassarese, Chinese, or otherwise ethnolocalized persons, also see themselves as *gay* or *lesbi* Indonesians. While neither I nor my interlocutors know of ethnolocalized *gay* or *lesbi* subjectivities (like “*gay* Javanese” or “*lesbi* Bugis”), my argument is descriptive, not prescriptive. Ethnolocalized *gay* or *lesbi* subject positions could form in the future, which would raise fascinating new questions. However, it seemed that my methodology should not render local what *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians have experienced as national.

Another possible misconstrual of this analysis concerns exceptionality: one could argue that *gay* and *lesbi* may be irreducible to ethnolocality, but that they are the exception that proves how most “Indonesians” are first and foremost ethnic. Yet it is clear that many persons in the archipelago who are not *gay* or *lesbi* see themselves in Indonesian as well as ethnolocalized terms. *Gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians exemplify, not exceptionalize, emergent patterns of national culture.

I hope to leave the reader with some sense of the great camaraderie, joy, and creativity of the *gay* and *lesbi* worlds, but these are also worlds of heartbreak and pain, and what the future holds for *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians remains uncertain. Therefore, I have gone to great lengths to protect the confidentiality of my interlocutors. All names except for that of Dédé Oetomo are pseudonyms, and details of persons, places, and situations have been altered.

## SECOND PRELUDE: NATIONAL IDENTITY CARDS

*Setting:* Surabaya, capital of the province of East Java. *Place:* near the Joyoboyo bus terminal, not far from the city zoo. *Time:* Saturday, October 18, 1997, ten o’ clock at night or so.

I have come here via minibus with some *gay* friends after watching a performance by male transvestites at the Taman Remaja amusement park. Paying our fare of 450 rupiah, we exit the terminal—an open space filled with over a hundred minibuses—and walk down a narrow street that runs alongside the Brantas River, a still sweep of inky water winding through Surabaya to the sea on the north edge of town. Under blue tarps, sellers in stalls lit with harsh fluorescent light watch over shoes, shirts, and music cassettes. Past the stalls the street gets quiet; almost no traffic here. To the right minibuses are lined up like locomotive cars, drivers sleeping in front seats or ambling to the river with plastic buckets, gathering brown water to rinse away a day's dirt and dust. A railing runs along the left side of the street, four feet high and made of horizontal metal bars with vertical supports. Two working streetlights filter dimly through the branches of large trees lining the road. Beyond the trees, the river slides along silently, streaked with white and gold from the lights of the shantytown on the other bank, wooden houses perched on stilts right over the river. A child laughs in the distance.

The bus station now at a safe remove, we see the expected groups of men extending down the street for a hundred yards or so, sitting or leaning on the barrier, half-hidden in shadow from the trees above. *This* left side of the street, past *this* bus station, along *this* railing, at *this* time of night, is *Texas*. Under this name, which plays off the term “*terminal*,” Texas has been one of the best-known places for *gay* men to meet in Surabaya since the 1980s. Its popularity has ebbed and peaked over the years (men desirous of other men have met in this area since at least the 1920s), but in the late 1990s Texas was quite popular. Like most of these places in Surabaya, Texas is named for a locale outside Indonesia. When you come here you are also, in a sense, elsewhere.

The first groups of men we encounter at Texas stare with hungry interest; only one or two smile in recognition. This part of Texas nearest the bus station is usually dominated by closed (*tertutup*) men; they generally come here once a week at most. Toward the middle of Texas the groups of men get larger and denser. While men in this area are sometimes looking for a sex partner, most seek conversation; indeed, many come here with friends or lovers. As a *gay* man put it one night, “I like to go to Texas because even if we have a partner we can still feel alone, feel how narrow this world is!”

Entering the central part of Texas I see a man I'll call Anwar, someone I saw year after year; he's been coming to this spot since the early 1980s. Anwar is the kind of person you could talk to about problems in your life—about a boyfriend who is having sex with another man, about pressure from your family to marry a woman (or your own desire to marry), about missing a partner who's moved elsewhere in search of work. You

could also depend on Anwar to entertain you with his effeminate clowning around. Swishing from side to side, exaggerating his hip motion in a hilarious way, he will wag his finger at someone, berating them good-naturedly and then suddenly breaking out in an a cappella song before returning to a monologue. One thing that seems to make him so hilarious is that he can poke fun while bringing up larger issues. On this night I find Anwar in the midst of a group of about twenty *gay* men, engaging everyone in uproarious conversation, when suddenly his head snaps to the right and he turns his attention to a space about ten yards down the road where a large tree provides shelter from the feeble street lamp—a darker periphery of Texas. Anwar has noticed a young man sitting on a motorcycle, someone no one knows. The young man sits in shy silence, watching the scene with apparent fascination and discomfort.

Never one to let an opportunity for drama slip by, Anwar takes the young man's shyness as a challenge. Dropping whatever line of commentary had been occupying him to that point, Anwar walks right up to the young man, who now appears positively embarrassed as all the eyes of Texas turn to see what Anwar will do. Anwar begins with a few short, teasing sentences, each of which contains a term in *gay* language: "my, isn't he young (*brondong*)!" "You are so handsome (*cucok*)!" The young man responds with a fetching but silent smile. Anwar concludes that the young man doesn't know *gay* language, is too shy to speak, or both. Clearly, more effort will be required to obtain the desired entertainment effect.

Anwar suddenly stands up straight and formal as a government official, turns one fist into an impromptu microphone, raises his voice to just below a shout so all Texas can hear, and taking on the measured and mellifluous tones of a television reporter, says "Are you new here?"

The young man answers haltingly into Anwar's "microphone": "Yes, this is my first time at this place."

Anwar's voice shifts to that of a cheery game show host: "well, you just keep coming back here, okay? Come back here tomorrow and it will be even more busy. This place will make you happy. Just bring your National Identity Card and we'll get you a second, *gay* National Identity Card. Bring some forms and two photographs and fifteen thousand rupiah and we'll get it for you." The audience bursts out in laughter: one shouts "What will he get with his new *gay* National Identity Card?" and Anwar answers: "A man!"

#### GLOBALIZATION, SIMILITUDE, AND DIFFERENCE

Similitude is the ultimate challenge both homosexuality and globalization pose to social theory; in both cases we appear to be confronted with a

“desire for the same.” As a result, a central theoretical project of this book is to develop an archipelagic framework for understanding similitude and difference. It is not enough to ask if globalization is “making the world more the same” or “making the world more different,” because how we decide when two things are “the same” or “different” is itself part of what is being globalized. Our rubrics for determining similitude and difference are not exterior to the object of study—globalization itself. It is in recognizing this fact that the anthropological study of globalization has the potential to move beyond, on one hand, the diffusionism that remains a legacy of the Boasian tradition (and indeed goes back to Herder), and, on the other hand, the scientific evolutionism that comes down to us from Tylor and Spencer, among others.

Anthropologists have tended to see sameness as a threat and difference as a solution, the self-prescribed medicine for what ails both anthropology (with its poorly thought-out evolutionisms) and Western culture (with its racisms and sexism). In this sense anthropology has been (and remains) largely heteronormative, in the etymological sense of *hetero* as “different.” It seems that we have reached a point of theoretical and political exhaustion with this trope of difference. The idea that we should value difference is nowadays either taken up as self-evident by all parties (even the Religious Right, for instance, talks about the value of difference) or imagined to be an inadequate formulation for the post-9/11 world. The multiculturalist trope that asks for the recognition of difference meets its limit when it encounters forms of incommensurability that refuse the sameness upon which that difference depends (Povinelli 2002). Our failure to realize that the sameness/difference binarism is also our “folk” model contributes to this conceptual logjam. An unfortunate consequence of the focus on difference within anthropology and cultural studies has been the ceding of similitude to sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, permitting these reductive and deeply compromised modes of inquiry to lay claim to categories of encompassment—the human, the universal, the panhistoric. And if languages of difference were central to the colonial encounter (Stoler 1995), experiences of postcoloniality are marked by rubrics in which difference reacquaints itself with similitude, regarding it with the skeptical familiarity of a long-lost love.

The task is not to reclaim sameness or the universal, but rather to scrutinize the very sameness/difference binarism and imagine alternative rubrics for knowledge that sidestep this binarism altogether. How can we use the methodologies and theoretical insights of cultural anthropology to do more than call for context? During “gay marriage” debates of the early 2000s, for instance, anthropologists intervened largely by showing that heterosexual monogamous marriage is not the only form of marriage worldwide. How could anthropology have contributed in ways other

than this demonstration of difference? What may push anthropology toward new relevance and insights may be not just the call for valuing difference, but a challenge to the implicit logics of sameness and difference that structure both the knowledge claims of anthropology and the systems of inequality that operate through the management of difference. Systems of oppressive power do not always obliterate difference; they also work through producing difference. I am thus interested in the theoretical and political possibilities of an anthropological deployment of the Other not predicated on difference. Contemporary dynamics of globalization demand an anthropology of similitude that does not reinscribe dominant subject positions (be they white, male, Western, heterosexual, or elite).

My analysis reexamines four binarisms shaping the literature on globalization and nonnormative sexualities and genders outside the West. The first binarism concerns genres of this literature. One focuses on political mobilizations that recall Western gay and lesbian movements. This genre tends to produce stories of convergence, assuming that terms like *gay* or *lesbi* are spread through international activism. The second genre focuses on “traditional” nonnormative sexualities. At its most romanticizing, such work takes the form of ethnocartography, “looking for evidence of same-gender sexuality and gendered ambiguity in ‘other’ societies . . . [this] ‘salvage anthropology’ of indigenous homosexualities remains largely insulated from important new theoretical work on postcolonial relations” (Weston 1993:341, 344). A second binarism consists of two recurrent reductionisms. The first—the reductionism of similitude—sees these persons as “just like” gay and lesbian persons in a homogenized West. They represent the transcendental gay man or lesbian woman, characterized by a supposed essential similitude that has been there all along, hidden under a veneer of exotic cultural difference. The second reductionism—the reductionism of difference—assumes these persons suffer from false consciousness and are traitors to their “traditional” sexualities, victims of (and, ultimately, collaborators with) a global gay imperialism. They represent the Westernized, inauthentic gay or lesbian. From this perspective these persons have an essential difference that is masked by terms like *gay* and *lesbi*. The third binarism concerns spatial scale: nonnormative sexualities and genders outside the West are seen as foundationally local phenomena (altered or not by globalization), or as foundationally global phenomena (altered or not by local contexts). The fourth binarism concerns celebratory or pessimistic attitudes toward globalization.

The four binarisms tend to line up as follows: gay and lesbian movements, structured by similitude, are assumed to be globalizing and positively affected by globalization, while traditional and indigenous cultures, structured by difference, are assumed to be localizing and negatively affected by globalization. This produces the two dominant tropes of global-

TABLE 1–1.  
Two tropes of globalization and sexuality.

	<i>Gay Planet</i>	<i>McGay</i>
Genre	gay and lesbian movements	traditional and indigenous cultures
Reductionism	similitude	difference
Spatial scale	global	local
Attitude toward globalization	positive	negative

ization and sexuality, which I term “Gay Planet” and “McGay” (as in “McDonald’s-ization”) (table 1–1). I set these up intentionally as straw men; while there is much work on nonnormative sexualities and genders outside the West that demonstrates a much more subtle understanding of globalization (including most of the works cited in this book), these tropes remain prevalent in academic and everyday discussions of sexuality and globalization. Both tropes oversimplify. The limitations of the Gay Planet trope are evident in its teleological assumption that nonnormative sexualities and genders worldwide will converge on Western models of identity and politics. Less discussed are the limits of the McGay trope’s doggedly pessimistic interpretation of globalizing processes.

The possibility of a nonthreatening and nonantagonistic relationship to processes of cultural globalization is almost completely absent in the literature on globalization and nonnormative sexualities and genders outside the West.<sup>6</sup> This reflects a common misconception associated with the reductionism of difference: namely, that gay men and lesbian women are products of the executive, jet-setting classes. Here the cultural effects of globalization are thought to correlate with class in a linear fashion: the richer you are, the more you are affected by globalization, and thus the less authentic you are. The proletariat becomes the new indigene. As any Nike factory worker in Indonesia could tell you, however, class is poorly correlated with the degree to which someone is impacted by globalizing forces. Often it is precisely the rich who have the time to acquire “tradition” (for instance, by learning “traditional” dances and music).

Understanding *gay* and *lesbi* lives will require reconfiguring the binarisms that structure the tropes of Gay Planet and McGay. A central goal of this book is to develop a third way of conceptualizing the apparent globalization of “gay” and “lesbian” that avoids these tropes. A first step is to reconsider what “globalization” means. A useful preliminary definition is “a social process in which the constraints of geography on social

and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding” (Waters 1995:3); in other words, who you are is less determined by where you’re at. Globalization, however, is more than a definition; it is a narrative—a story with settings, a cast of characters, and a plot that moves through time. Gibson-Graham (1996) notes its similarity to rape narratives: both present a masculinized entity (the rapist, global capitalism) as always already in a position of dominance and a feminized entity (the rape victim, the local) in a position of weakness. This is more than a metaphorical parallel: as narratives about relationality and transfer, stories of sexuality are stories of globalization and vice versa. Gibson-Graham hopes that “a queer perspective can help to unsettle the consonances and coherences of the narrative of global commodification” (144). This narrative of globalization as rape underlies the McGay trope.

My analysis deconstructs the reductionisms of similitude and difference by insisting that the issue is not the world’s becoming more the same or more different under globalization (neither homogenization nor heterogenization *per se*), but the transformation of the very yardsticks by which one decides whether something is the same or different in the first place; that is, reconfigurations of the grid of similitude and difference. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault (1970) characterized shifts in Western European thought in terms of conceptualizations of similitude and difference. What analytic purchase might be gained by positing, under some circumstances at least, a postcolonial order of things in which relationships between same and other were characterized not as boundaries transgressed but as boundaries blurred, not as borders crossed but as borderlands inhabited, not as spheres adjoined but as archipelagoes intertwined?

In other words, what is needed is an approach that recognizes how conceptions of similitude and difference do not stand outside the globalizing processes they seek to describe.<sup>7</sup> The very notion of “cross-cultural research” must be rethought when the cultures in question have been “crossing” in advance of the ethnographic encounter. This challenges dominant theories of knowledge, since difference typically constitutes the “Aha!” moment justifying knowledge production in the Western academy. *Gay* and *lesbi* subjectivities break the equation of “the local” with similitude and “the global” with difference. This is not a cosmopolitanism by which national subjects (usually urban elites) imagine themselves as part of a community transcending the nation. Nor is it a diaspora in which gay or lesbian selves disperse from an originary homeland, or a hybridity in which two prior unities turn difference into similitude via an “implicit politics of heterosexuality” (Young 1995:25). Careful attention to *gay* and *lesbi* lives will show conceptions of selfhood, desire, and belonging that transcend the tropes of McGay and Gay Planet. This shows the limits

of approaches that frame the emergence of postcolonial gay and lesbian subjectivities in terms of dualisms of rupture versus continuity, indicating instead how “what is happening in Bangkok, Rio, and Nairobi is the creating of new forms of understanding and regulating the sexual self, but it is unlikely that they will merely repeat those forms which were developed in the Atlantic world” (Altman 2001:100; see also Jackson 2004). In this regard my analysis shares a theoretical agenda with anthropological work on Indonesia that is concerned to “avoid the pitfalls of both . . . an essentialized native identity celebrated for its heroic resistance to the incursions of externalized powers—or of the complete loss of self in which cultural alterity would be thoroughly subsumed, dominated, and erased” (Spyer 1996:27). Like Spyer and others, “What I hope to show instead is a third possibility, one in which the inescapable insertion within a wider world is infused and, at times, unsettled by the sense of coming from a ‘different’ place” (Spyer 1996:27).

### THIRD PRELUDE: AT THE RESTAURANT

*Setting:* the north coast of Bali, where lush southern vistas give way to dry slopes of the great Agung volcano. *Place:* a tourist zone outside the city of Singaraja. *Time:* Monday evening, slow and quiet, a sky of brilliant stars save a black wall to the south where Agung lies as if in wait.

Ita’s family runs a restaurant at the end of a lane snaking toward the ocean, lined with shops hawking the familiar paraphernalia of any tourist area in Bali—souvenirs, film processing, guided tours. Like many tourist restaurants, the main dining area is an open pavilion, with the kitchen and owner’s home in back. Tonight Ita has Tracy Chapman, one of her favorite lesbian Western singers, on the stereo. Save for a Western couple eating dinner, the restaurant is empty of patrons. This is one of the main places that *lesbi* women along this stretch of the coast come to socialize. Tonight there are ten *lesbi* women sitting around an empty table at one end of the restaurant, including Ita and her lover, Tuti. Ita, thirty years old, has been with Tuti for ten years. “When we met Tuti was still in high school and I had just graduated. I moved here from my village a couple miles away when my parents built this restaurant. Tuti works at her parents’ souvenir shop just a few buildings down; that’s how I met her. For almost ten years I didn’t go back to my village, even though it’s so close you can walk there. Because whenever I’d go back, people would always pester me about getting married: ‘Where’s your boyfriend?’ And they would tell me that I was ruining the family name, and stuff like that. Now I go back, because they don’t pressure me to marry anymore.”

Tuti sits with Ita, noticeably affectionate in the safety of the restaurant: one hand holding Ita’s hand, the other on Ita’s knee. Tuti says: “I’m

twenty-seven years old and was raised in this village. My parents are still here too; I work at their art shop down the street. From the moment I saw Ita I wanted to be with her. I was afraid she'd be mad at me and reject me, so I approached her slowly, got to know her, and soon it was clear that the feelings were mutual. Now we sleep together every night, either here at her house or mine. My parents still pressure me to get married, but they know about us and are okay with our relationship. I think they're just used to it because we've been together so long. The only one who doesn't accept it is one of my older siblings. He still gets really mad. So if he comes to the art shop, Ita runs back to this restaurant. I'd like to coordinate the *lesbi* women here, but it's hard. But what does happen is that we get together in the evenings, like we're doing right now, to give each other advice. And I've found work for a couple *lesbi* women at my parents' souvenir shop. Most of our *lesbi* friends here are very closed. When we meet as a group, it's always at my souvenir shop, or here at the restaurant, because the others are too afraid to have us over as a group. *Lesbi* women have a hard time getting a job around here, especially if they look masculine. It's hard for us to meet each other, find out about each other, because women can't go out alone at night."

Irma and her girlfriend have been sitting next to Ita and Tuti this whole time. They've come to the restaurant tonight to ask for advice: Irma's parents have threatened to throw her out of the family unless she ends the relationship. Irma says, "I said I had stopped seeing her, that now I come to the coast just to work. Now I'm due to go back to my village and they'll expect me to bring back presents as proof that I'm working. But of course I'm not working and I don't have any money. So what should I do?" Ita talks to Irma about what she calls the "right to love": "You should tell her parents, 'If you say I can't be with her, why don't you just kill me at the same time and be done with it.' Maybe that will make them realize how you feel." This night, as so many other nights, *lesbi* women talk about belonging. It might sound at first like a language of tradition: parents, villages, and shame. Yet these women call themselves *lesbi*, talk about the "right to love," socialize not only with each other but with *gay* men, and find it perfectly reasonable that a gay Western anthropologist, not unlike the occasional gay or lesbian Western tourists they meet, should want to join them at the restaurant for a night's conversation.

#### POSTCOLONIALITY AND POSTMODERNITY

Part 1 of this book, "The Indonesian Subject," lays the groundwork for my cumulative argument. Following this introduction, chapter 2 addresses the history of "homosexuality" in Indonesia up to the 1980s. Chapter 3 brings together the fact that most *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians

come to their sexualities through mass media, and a recent debate in which the dubbing of foreign television shows into the Indonesian language was banned on the grounds Indonesians would no longer be able to tell where their culture ends and the West begins, to analyze how the *gay* and *lesbi* subject positions shape the lives of those Indonesians who take them up as lived categories of experience.

Part 2, “Opening to *Gay* and *Lesbi* Worlds,” turns in greater detail to the everyday lives of contemporary *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians. Chapter 4 explores desire, sexual practices, and romantic relationships, as well as the fact that most *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians marry “heterosexually” and may not see this as inconsistent with being *gay* or *lesbi*. I continue my theorization of an anthropology of similitude through these ethnographic materials and discuss how the shift from arranged to “love” marriages in modern Indonesia, and the link between this shift and ideals of the good citizen, has powerfully linked heterosexuality and choice with national belonging. Chapter 5 explores the differing geographies of the *gay* and *lesbi* worlds, their intersections, and how they are influenced by Indonesian national culture. Chapter 6 examines the “style” of being *gay* or *lesbi*, from gender performativity to language use. It links this to the idea of “national style” and explores the relationship between practice and subjectivity. I also address the place of religion in *gay* and *lesbi* lives.

Part 3, “Sexuality and Nation,” builds on the ethnographic, historical, and theoretical work of parts 1 and 2 to examine the imbrication of *gay* and *lesbi* subjectivities with national discourse. Chapter 7 examines how the “archipelago concept” and “family principle,” two key ideologies of the postcolonial nation-state, have shaped the *gay* and *lesbi* subject positions. *Gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians stand as the greatest success story of the postcolonial Indonesian state—the truest example of national subjectivities, irreducible to ethnicity, locality, or tradition. Yet as success stories the state never intended to facilitate into being, they are also doomed to failure since they cannot be ethnocalized. They are of the “archipelago” but ultimately belong to no “island” and thus do not “belong.” This shows how discourses of race and ethnicity are pertinent not just to the United States, but to that subset of the “new queer studies” that examines sexuality outside the West (Manalansan 2003:6). Chapter 8 summarizes the theoretical and ethnographic arguments of the book, addressing its broader implications for sexuality, national belonging, and globalization.

While the term “postcolonial” can be problematic (Shohat 1992), I find it crucial for understanding the *gay* and *lesbi* subject positions: “its theoretical value . . . lies precisely in its refusal of this ‘here’ and ‘there,’ ‘then’ and ‘now,’ ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ perspective” (Hall 1996:247). My theorization of Indonesian postcoloniality begins from a dilemma: not only In-

Indonesia's boundaries but much of its bureaucracy, economic structure, and even "cultural" elements were produced through the colonial encounter. The dilemma is one of authenticity: is "Indonesia" nothing more than a new label for the Dutch East Indies; is it merely a derivative discourse (Chatterjee 1986)?

Postcolonial rhetoric unites state and nation: the country is no longer occupied by a foreign power; rulers and ruled are one. Postcolonial states share with their former overlords a use of "the family" not only as metaphor but as "a cheap and efficient surrogate for the state" itself (Mosse 1985:20). As Mosse notes in his study of nationalism and sexuality in Europe, the family is particularly useful for inculcating and monitoring notions of sexual propriety in a context where respectability is seen as crucial. In the Indonesian context, concerns over respectability often take the form of debates over authenticity and belonging.

Beyond a foundation in heteronormativity, perhaps the only common element all postcolonial contexts share is an understanding of modernity as the goal toward which the nation-state should strive while preserving its unique "traditions." *Gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians themselves speak of being "*modern*," a highly visible concept in Indonesian public culture. Increasingly, anthropologists and other social researchers have taken up modernity as a topic of investigation under the rubric of "alternative modernities." In doing so they seek to transcend an earlier modernization paradigm that framed the modern as the realization of a historical teleology based in the West, in favor of exploring how modernity is reconfigured in non-Western contexts. The body of scholarship is so large as to constitute "modernity" as a new ethnographic present—increasingly, it stands in for "culture" itself (Rutherford 2003a:93). I thus locate this book within a larger field of interest in modernity within Asian studies. Asians are consuming modernity (Breckenridge 1995), inhabiting modernity (Chakrabarty 2002), making modernity (Das 2000), swallowing modernity (Mintz 1998), performing modernity (Schein 1999), overcome by modernity (Harootunian 2002), entangling with modernity (Spyer 2000), messianically modern (Rutherford 2003b:137–171), suitably modern (Liechty 2003), or simply "being modern" (Vickers 1996). Modernity in Asia is at large (Appadurai 1996), alternative (S. Brenner 1996), translated (Liu 1995), with its mediums (Morris 2000), imagined (Rodgers 1991), linked to matriliney (Stivens 1996), or simply "other" (Rofel 1999).<sup>8</sup>

There has been little critical attention to this interest in modernity; for instance, Steedly's review on the state of culture theory in Southeast Asia makes no mention of it, despite its importance to her own work (Steedly 1999, 2000). The growth of interest in "alternative modernities" demands an exploration of how this very notion of a fractured and reconfig-

urable modernity is postmodern and can thus destabilize the normative Western white heterosexual male subject (Massey 1994:215). Postmodernity is a specific, if debated, historical phenomenon linked to the loss of faith in human perfectibility and progress in the wake of world wars, decolonization, and a shifting global economic order (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1991; Lyotard 1984). One aspect of the collapse of metanarratives is the possibility of multiple modernities, “alternative” to each other and with no overarching expectation of synthesis. There has been a striking retreat from the anthropology of postmodernity, perhaps induced by the lamentable vulgarization of “postmodern” from a specific theory of political economy, representation, and culture to an epithet hurled at methodologies or writing strategies one finds difficult to apprehend.<sup>9</sup> Yet what is the anthropology of alternative modernities if not an anthropology of postmodernity? I wish to banalize *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians and indicate their embeddedness in the general trajectories of Indonesian public culture. For these Indonesians *difference* is no longer isomorphic with *distance*. *Gay* and *lesbi* subjectivities are imagined not in terms of concentric spheres of decreasing familiarity, but archipelagically; someone thousands of miles away might be “closer” than someone next door who is not *gay* or *lesbi*. An ethnographic investigation of *gay* and *lesbi* experience holds the promise of illuminating how a “modern” way of being persists at the intersection of postcoloniality and globalization. A stance of respect toward the Indonesian subject is the precondition for any such investigation.