# CHAPTER FIVE: Geographies of Belonging

## PLACE AND SUBJECTIVITY

Warias are usually identified as such by playmates or neighbors long before they take up waria subjectivity. There is no need for learning of the concept "waria" through mass media and little notion of a "waria world"; warias are part of the recognized social mosaic. In contrast, gay and lesbi Indonesians’ "desire for the same" has no place in the normal world. They must contend with a society that is largely unaware of their existence, living their sexual subjectivities within the gay and lesbi worlds.1 There is more to a gay or lesbi life than being gay or lesbi, but other discourses shaping their lives—the family, ethnicity, religion, nation—are sustained through institutions like bureaucracies, households, and mosques. In Southeast Asia such institutions are publicly recognized through architecture, ritual, and everyday social interaction: "it is the ubiquity of publicly displayed cultural forms that gives the region its distinctive aura" (Bowen 1995:1048). The gay and lesbi worlds lack such recognition; gay and lesbi Indonesians must thus live out their sexual subjectivities on the margins of the normal world.

For gay and lesbi Indonesians there is usually a distinction between "becoming" (menjadi) gay or lesbi, which refers to self-awareness, and opening oneself (membuka diri), which refers to participating in the gay or lesbi world. To my knowledge gay and lesbi Indonesians never speak of "opening oneself to oneself" in the way that Western gay men and lesbian often speak of "coming out to oneself" as the first stage in an incremental process of coming out to the world.

No census of the gay and lesbi worlds exists, but for thousands (and possibly tens or hundreds of thousands) of Indonesians these worlds are spaces of sociality—camaraderie, desire, and love—a source of great pleasure and meaning. The places of the gay and lesbi worlds are sites of belonging and recognition, places to find people who are the "same" (sama) as oneself because they too "desire the same." One gay man who regularly went to a park at night observed that "people think that the only reason people go to this park is to find a [sex] partner. That guess is correct for those who are newcomers. But ‘old stock’ like me go to this park only for refreshing [refreshing]." Another came to the park to "get

rid of feelings of boredom and frustration, so I don’t feel alone in the middle of my neighborhood."

This chapter focuses on the geography of the gay and lesbi worlds—a geography of belonging—and "the role of spatialization in social reproduction" (Shields 1997:192).2 I am interested in how being gay and lesbi is shaped by spatial dimensions of domination, by the relationship between space and desire: desire operates across space, and space "unleashes desire" (Lefebvre 1991:97). The fragmented character of the gay and lesbi worlds influences a sense that these subjectivities are fragmented as well: like the gay men in Jakarta studied by Howard, gay men and lesbi women in all of my field sites overwhelmingly saw Indonesia "as being divided into distinct social worlds, and they recognized the fact that in some sense they had to become different people in different locations in social space" (Howard 1996:263). This fragmentation shapes a powerful sense of separation from what one desires—separation from other gay and lesbi Indonesians, from normal society, from the nation itself. How is a marginalized "desire for the same" articulated through geographical imaginaries?

## GEOGRAPHIES OF THE GAY WORLD

### Tempat Ngebers

Across Indonesia nighttime in the city marks not the end of the day but a beginning. The sun’s searing heat is replaced by electric streetlights, whose orange glow mixes with dust and smoke to form a gentle haze pressing downward. The streets take on new life: exhausted factory workers nodding asleep on minibuses, teenagers on motorcycles en route to the cinema, husbands and wives strolling down the street. And among these varied groups of people, gay men meet at "hanging-out places," known in many parts of Indonesia as tempat ngeber (tempat means "place"; ngeber is a gay language term for "hang out") and sometimes by other terms like tempat ngumpul ("gathering place"). One tempat ngeber, Texas (in Surabaya), appeared in chapter 1. The largest tempat ngeber in Bali during my fieldwork was probably PPT, a contraction for Puputan, the town square of Denpasar, Bali’s capital. This is a broad expanse of grass alternating with groves of trees and bushes: a statue of the warrior Udayana stands at one end of the square as the inhabitants of Denpasar cross en route to the nearby government office, hospital, or temple. On the south side of the square sits a bench, where in the late evenings one can often find five or ten gay men talking and laughing with each other, more on a Saturday night. The bench is on the perimeter of the park and faces the street; occasionally a man will circle once or twice on a motorcycle, then pull up to greet his friends. Many Indonesians who have moved

to Bali from other islands prefer the tourist zones to PPT: the promise of a Westerner, cash payment, or both compares favorably to the relatively nonsexual atmosphere here. Some Balinese men do not like to come here either; they fear being seen by family or neighbors. "The Balinese here are very closed," said Bagus, a gay man from Bali, sitting on the curb with Nyoman, his lover, also from Bali; in the gay world they use the same last name as a token of their relationship. "Surabaya is more opened," Nyoman added. They live together at the house of Bagus’s parents, who think they are just friends.

The gay world is a constellation of conceptually linked sites ranging from bedrooms to shopping malls. It is the more public of these sites that are termed tempat ngebers, and most gay men see these as prototypical elements of the gay world. Gay men across Indonesia describe their city or village—and other cities or parts of Indonesia they have visited or heard about—as being relatively "opened" or "closed." This indexes not the visibility of the gay world but its extensiveness: a city can be seen as "opened" even though normal Indonesians are unaware of the gay geography in their midst. One thing that makes a place "opened" is the presence of tempat ngebers, and tempat ngebers are considered the most "opened" parts of the gay world because they occupy civic space. An "opened" city has lots of busy tempat ngebers. If you call yourself a "member of the gay world" (anggota dunia gay), you probably spend a lot of time in tempat ngebers. Even gay men who do not go to tempat ngebers usually know they exist and see them as important sites of the gay world. Along with the other elements of the gay world discussed below, they are places of gay geography forged within spaces of modern Indonesia, places to find friendship, sex, and love.3 As an ethnographer, tempat ngebers allowed me to enter the gay world in a new city and connect with gay men over months and years.

The general concept of tempat ngebers is familiar to gay men across Indonesia. Tempat ngebers tend to occupy civic spaces like parks, town squares, bridges, waterfronts, or bus stations. This is often the case even in towns with only a few thousand inhabitants. Late on a Thursday or Saturday night at a major tempat ngeber like PPT in Denpasar, kampus (campus), located at Karebosi, Makassar’s town square, or Pattaya in Surabaya, I have seen a hundred persons gathered together. More usually there are five to twenty men at a tempat ngeber at any point in time. Tempat ngebers are rarely coextensive with an entire civic space; only a portion, usually at the periphery, becomes the tempat ngeber. This permits a degree of invisibility within the most public places. Texas corresponds to no feature of everyday geography: it is one side of a street, along a river, behind the Joyoboyo bus station. Kampus is not identical to Karebosi

(even when "Karebosi" is used as a shorthand for it); it is part of the square’s edge, as is the case for other tempat ngebers found in town squares, like PPT in Denpasar and LA (Los Angeles) in Yogyakarta.

The civic location of tempat ngebers can be explained in utilitarian terms. Since physical violence and police harassment against gay men have been rare, a central location is preferable because it is easy to invent an excuse for being seen there; this also makes them accessible to normal men who may be looking for sex. Such locations are also easy to access by public transport even at night, which is crucial since many gay men cannot afford a motorcycle. But a utilitarian characterization misses the specific conjunction of place, practice, and power at hand—what de Certeau addressed through his distinction between strategies and tactics. For de Certeau a strategy is formed through the hegemonic power to set the geographic terms of discussion; it "postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base [for managing] relations with an exteriority" (1984:356). Tactics lack this power and thus both institutionalization and control over place. They cannot construct "a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety" (xix). Like all nodes of the gay and lesbi worlds, tempat ngebers are tactics, "situational" territories of the self (Goffman 1971:29) that insinuate themselves into civic space, national space—the "other" that will not acknowledge one’s existence.

De Certeau also emphasized that "a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing.’ Whatever it wins, it does not keep" (xix). This seizing of place "on the wing" is not unlike the dynamic of dubbing. Few tempat ngebers are such twenty-four hours a day. It would make no sense to tell someone "Let’s meet at Texas at eleven in the morning"; Makassar’s kampus is nothing more than Karebosi square during the day. As one man said when we drove past Texas one afternoon, "It’s closed right now," using the same term (tertutup) used in reference to "closed" persons. Most tempat ngebers are associated with particular days of the week. Saturday night is generally a big evening for leisure and thus a good night for tempat ngebers. Many businesses are closed in the afternoons on Friday in observance of weekly prayers for Muslims, and as a result Thursday nights are also busy. Though some gay men go to tempat ngebers nearly every day of the week, many go only on these busier days. A few tempat ngebers, such as Pattaya in Surabaya, have daytime visitors, including men who have office jobs and make a brief visit on their lunch break to socialize.

Hasan spoke in chapter 3 about first seeing himself as gay after an encounter with mass media. Several years following this shift in subjectivity:

I was walking by Karebosi. I thought there were only warias there and didn’t know gay men gathered there. And by coincidence when I walked by someone called out to me. I thought "this is a nice person" and didn’t think about it, it was just small talk, relaxed, and then one of them started speaking openly [terbuka] to me, admitting that he was attracted to me. And I was surprised. "How can someone be so open?" When I was a man and he was a man. And that was when I started to think that "oh, apparently in Indonesia we can already find people like this, not only outside [di luar]."

For Hasan it was at tempat ngebers that gay started to index a geography located neither "outside" nor "in Makassar" but "in Indonesia." Even though mass media are usually how gay subjectivity is first entered, and quite a few gay men have their first sex with men who do not term themselves gay, tempat ngebers are often the sites where they learn a gay world exists, as illustrated by Karim:

There was a nighttime event at Karebosi, and I was walking by and met some gay men [hémong]…. And I really didn’t know anything, even though I lived and grew up in Makassar, I only knew that it was a place for warias, only that, I didn’t know it was a gay place [tempat gay]. After I was taken into it, oh, I started to know "oh, the northern part of Karebosi, that’s the place where gay men gather," and I started to learn…. In the end I made a lot of friends. And someone that I met at Karebosi became my partner for a year or two.

The story leads from learning about a tempat ngeber to friendship and finally love; when speaking of what he discovered, Karim introduces a term of gay language (hémong), language that indexes the gay world. Tarik learned the term gay "from watching television, from health consultations in magazines." When he encountered the term "it was like a harpoon struck me…. I was reading the magazine, and it was like ‘this is the same [sama] with what I’ve experienced.’ " Only after graduating from high school did he "start to get together with gay men [sémongsémong]"; to find them he "met them on the street … from one to one information was passed." Like Karim, Tarik introduces a term of gay language (sémong) when describing the moment of meeting other gay men. This relationship to tempat ngebers takes roughly the same form across Indonesia. In Bali, Made was attracted to men from a young age and learned about the term gay from "letters to the editors of newspapers asking ‘why am I like this?,’ reports in women’s magazines, and so on." But then:

It turned out that a brother-in-law got sick, so I had to spend a lot of time at the hospital at Denpasar, helping take care of him. So I would go walking around at night. And one night just by chance I happened to walk by Puputan. That’s how I found it, just by chance! I was so surprised. I walked by there and was

hanging around, and someone said, "So you realize this is a place for gay men?" I was shocked! Because Puputan, then as now, was mixed: the gay men just hung out on one side of the park. Once I knew, I started going there again. My questions started to get answered, and I didn’t feel lonely anymore. I knew there were other people like me, and I would go there a lot to make friends. I’d already known the term "gay" before then, but I’d never actually known any gay people other than myself.

Puputan was also important to Agus, like Made a Hindu gay man:

In my first year of high school I heard you could find warias at the town square at night. My classes were in the morning, so one afternoon I walked by there. But it was around five o’clock and there wasn’t anyone there of course! I thought to myself, "How strange, there’s no one here but little kids and their parents!" About two weeks later I went again around 7 in the evening, but there still weren’t many people there. After that, a week later I went for the third time, even later, around 8 P.M. And it was a Saturday night. And so I sat down there, right there at the bench where we still sit today. And a guy came up to me. It was around 9 P.M. by then. He asked me "What time is it?" but I didn’t have a watch on. After that, he started asking me where I lived, with whom I lived, where I went to school, stuff like that. He asked me what I was doing there, what I was looking for, and I said, "I’m not looking for anything; I’m just hanging around." After that, I went the following day again, around 10 P.M., and I met another guy.

Tempat ngebers are sites of belonging, not sex in isolation: gay men (and some normal men) use them to find a sex partner, but more often they are places to talk about the joys and sorrows of life, to discover romance, or simply to sit quietly in the presence of men like yourself. As a gay man in Makassar put it, you can "get together, joke around, things like that, get to know each other." A gay man in Surabaya recalled how "I met friends who … were of the same fate [senasib] as me. So I had a lot of friends and I wasn’t sad." Gay men usually go to tempat ngebers as the last event of their day before returning home, spending an hour or two beginning around 10 P.M. There is great variation—visits from five minutes to all night long; beginning as late as 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and as early as 8 P.M., though rarely before sunset. However, this variation does not correlate with cities or ethnic groups; the broad patterns of inhabiting tempat ngebers appear to be roughly consistent across the archipelago.

Gay men often use pseudonyms when in the gay world and do not reveal if they are married to a woman: two gay men may get to know each other quite well without knowing much about their life in the normal world. The topics of discussion at tempat ngebers are usually internal to the gay world—joking, gossip about relationships and sex, occasionally

talk about personal problems like a lover who has ended a relationship or family pressure to marry a woman. As a gay man from Surabaya put it: "I only became brave enough to enter the gay world two years ago. And new people want to know about things, right? It makes us happy. I want to know about things, know and know and know. Want to hang out at places like Kalifor [a tempat ngeber located on a bridge near a major shopping mall in central Surabaya, near a river (kali) and named after California]. Just to talk with my friends, and then go home."

Distinctions usually develop between tempat ngebers within a city, primarily between those visible to passers-by and those more hidden. Across Indonesia, tempat ngebers in the former category are termed "opened" (terbuka) and in the latter "closed" (tertutup)—the same framework used with reference to entire cities and even nations, and also with reference to persons. Opened tempat ngebers tend to attract opened gay men, while closed tempat ngebers tend to attract closed gay men as well as men looking for sex who may not term themselves gay. Pattaya was created around 1997 and quickly become the most popular tempat ngeber in Surabaya because of its location: gay men described it as closed and quiet (sepi), allowing closed persons to socialize more easily than at Texas and Kalifor, which many saw as too public (umum). Socializing is so central to gay men’s use of tempat ngebers that many choose different places for sexual encounters:

I like gay men for friendship, but not for sex. So I go to Texas to meet friends and hang out, but I go to the Bungarasih bus terminal to find men for sex. There are lots of men from out of town who arrive on an evening bus and spend the night there sleeping on the curb. So I say "hey, I live near here and you can just spend the night with me." When we get to my room, I tell them that I want to have sex with them. Sometimes they refuse at the beginning, but I show them gay porn videos and seduce them, and so far I’ve never had a man who didn’t eventually have sex with me.

Most tempat ngebers also have an internal structure calibrated along the opened-closed continuum. While it might seem that the outer fringes of a tempat ngeber would be considered opened and the center closed, the reverse tends to be the case. For instance, the more central part of Texas, away from the normal world, is where opened men gather, while its ends, cloaked in shadow and closer to large streets, are frequented by closed men. The more opened men of the center may come to Texas five nights a week, while the closed men who frequent its periphery may show up only once or twice a month.

This metonymic linking of opened men to opened parts of tempat ngebers and opened cities, and closed men to closed parts of tempat ngebers and closed cities, shows how the opened-closed continuum references the

gay world. You are an opened gay man not because your parents or coworkers know about you, nor because you go to rallies or write letters to the newspaper, but because you spend time in the gay world and particularly in parts of that world considered opened. Sometimes a gay man who comes frequently to a tempat ngeber will be regarded as a kind of leader to whom others turn for advice, the "queen of Texas" or "the person who shuts down Pattaya every night." The movements of gay men through different parts of tempat ngebers constitute them as more opened or closed; it is the kind of social practice by which subject positions become instantiated as subjectivities. The relationship is, in Piercian terms, indexical rather than iconic: to shift one Saturday night from one’s typical perch on a railing at the perimeter of a tempat ngeber to its center does not just mark one as opened, but is part of the process of opening oneself (see Butler 1990; Mahmood 2001).

### Malls

Tempat ngebers have begun appearing within shopping malls, making them important elements of the gay world (cf. Leong 1995). Malls in Indonesia range from the basic to the truly spectacular, signifying modernity and economic transformation. The shift from open-air markets (pasar), with their connotations of earthy trading and the selling of foodstuffs, to enclosed malls (mal), where prices are fixed and the most common items are consumer goods like clothes and electronics, represents an emerging ideal of conspicuous, collective consumerism as a social activity that, separate from the items actually purchased, marks middle-class status and modernity. Surabaya’s Tunjungan Plaza, one of the largest malls in Southeast Asia, comprises four linked atria ranging from four to eight stories high, boasting hundreds of shops (including McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Dunkin Donuts); Tunjungan 1 features a multiplex movie theater, and for several years Tunjungan 3 featured an ice-skating rink.4 On most afternoons the mall is filled with Indonesians—the wealthy to make their purchases and others to socialize, enjoy the free air conditioning, and watch the spectacle of shopping and ice skating. Without an ice skating rink or movie theater, Tunjungan 2 is quiet. On its third floor, near the Gunung Agung bookstore, are a few wooden benches. Sitting on them or leaning over the rail in front of the store are often a few gay men, alone or in small groups. There is a public bathroom nearby, and men sometimes stare a little too long at the man next to them, signaling interest through eye contact. If the interest is reciprocated, the men may leave the mall together or sneak into one of the fire escape stairwells in the mall for oral sex.

Some gay men go to both malls and tempat ngebers, but most go predominantly to one or the other. Gay men often go to malls in small groups to spend time with gay friends; after opening in 2000, the Ratu Indah Mall in Makassar became popular among gay men. Others, like Suprati, use malls primarily to find sex partners. A regular at Tunjungan Plaza, Suprati rarely goes to outdoor tempat ngebers like Texas because he is takut dihafal (literally, "afraid of being memorized"). For this reason his knowledge of many practices of the gay world is minimal; for instance, gay language: "I don’t know all those gay terms." He likes normal men as sexual partners; one current partner is a doctor, another in the military. He prefers such men to gay men because he and they "close each other" (saling menutupi); that is, keep their relationship hidden.

While malls have become quasi-civic spaces in contemporary Indonesia, their private ownership and orientation toward moneyed classes makes them less public than a park or town square. Malls are not open late at night, so gay men must visit them at the same time others do. This makes it is easier to find normal men for sex and to be inconspicuous, but one must be careful lest gossip make its way back to friends, family, or workplace colleagues. Effeminacy is rare in malls, as are groups of more than a handful of men. Nevertheless, provided one dresses in a manner reflecting the modernity associated with malls (e.g., not in "traditional" dress or as a waria), accessing malls is not difficult even if one’s income is low.

If looking to find a sex partner, gay men usually come alone and communicate through "playing eyes" (main mata). One gay man who liked to go Tunjungan Plaza said, "I would know who is gay there. They’d usually be hanging out around the glass walls in Tunjungan 1, just looking around. Or at Gunung Agung. And lots of people also hanging out in Tunjungan 3, looking down on the ice skating rink…. You’d see someone standing there alone, watching the ice skating for a long time. With someone like that there’d be a possibility that they were ‘sick.’" While in the West parks are stereotyped as cruising grounds saturated with sex, for gay men malls are often more sexualized than parks, attracting men interested solely in finding sexual partners. Seemingly so public, malls are good places to be closed.

### Discos

Normal Indonesians usually walk past a group of men in a park or mall without realizing they have passed through a node of the gay world. One element of gay geography has a slightly more stable presence—discos that have a gay night, usually informally recognized but occasionally openly declared. Gay nights have taken place in discos in several Indonesian cities

since at least the mid-1980s. In major cities like Jakarta and Surabaya, or in the Kuta tourist zone of Bali, disco patrons on some nights can be almost entirely gay men with a few warias and lesbi women. Elsewhere gay nights are usually mixed (campur), with normal Indonesians present. In these cases gay men hang out more discreetly. Because discos have owners, gay nights are less stable than tempat ngebers or malls; they end when the owner sells the establishment or decides the gay night is unprofitable. Particularly in the capital of Jakarta, normal Indonesians who know of the gay world sometimes conflate it with discos. Since 2002, several private television stations have run segments about gay Indonesian life; such segments almost always begin with footage from a disco "exemplifying" what gay life is like.

Sensation was one disco where I conducted fieldwork during the late 1990s: located on the second floor of an otherwise nondescript building in a southeastern district of Surabaya, its gay night was on Thursdays. One Thursday I took a minibus from Texas to Sensation with Robert, a gay friend. On the night in question Robert forgot to wear shoes: "they won’t let me in with these sandals," he said dejectedly. In the ground floor entryway the walls quaked from the music above as we entered (Robert made it in, self-consciously looking away from his feet). About forty feet deep with a narrow second-floor balcony on three sides, the small disco was packed with over two hundred men and about twenty warias. Underneath the balcony and behind the dance floor, sofas and chairs were lit by the intermittent constellations of innumerable cigarettes; a bar to the right of the stairs served drinks to thirsty patrons. Hip-hop music filled the room, making it difficult to converse as men filled the dance floor. Elsewhere, pairs of men sat together or even stole a kiss under the darkness of the balcony.

After half an hour the music stopped, leaving behind a sudden cacophony of conversation and laughter. Everyone backed away from the dance floor to form a tightly packed circle as the deejay’s voice filled the room: "Welcome to Sensation! It’s time for the evening’s show." Sensation’s show was a weekly event; the music was mostly Western pop, with only a few Indonesian songs thrown in. The performers were both warias and gay men but there was no live band; they sang what in Indonesian is termed playback, lip-synching to the recorded voices of others (see Boellstorff 2004b). The show began with a man playbacking a Western pop ballad, followed by a waria playbacking the theme from the movie Titanic. As each performed, beautifully dressed and face full of emotion, audience members walked onto the dance floor and stuffed thousand-rupiah bills (about 15 cents each) into bosoms, pants, or shorts.

The third performer was another waria, with short hair and a tight-fitting knee-length white dress. She began playbacking to an Indonesian

pop song of love gone awry, Aku benci ("I hate"). Each verse of the song lists a grievance suffered by a woman from an uncaring lover, followed by the phrase aku benci. By the second or third repetition a few mischievous gay men were singing along, substituting aku banci ("I am a waria"). Soon the entire audience had picked up on the joke and at the end of each verse the room echoed with aku banci!, gay men pointing at themselves in mock pity or rolling on the floor in laughter. Above the fray, the waria kept her composure with a wry smile.

This joking play on the gay/waria boundary (see chapter 6) was possible because of the greater degree of privacy offered by discos. While upper-class gay men prefer discos and rarely enter tempat ngebers, many middle- and lower-class gay men go to both discos and tempat ngebers; some even socialize exclusively in discos. There is always the matter of the fee (five thousand rupiah [about seventy-five cents] in 1998 at Sensation, fifteen thousand rupiah [about two dollars] in 2002 at the disco that replaced it), but gay men will save all month to afford the ticket. Anzar lived in Bali during my fieldwork but was from Surabaya: "When I’m in Surabaya, I don’t go to Texas much, because I’m afraid of being seen by my family. Gay people at that place are too overboard, they’re too open [terlalu terbuka], they even kiss each other out there. But at Sensation it’s no problem, because it’s enclosed; it’s not outside. And the people who go there are all like us, so it’s not possible they’d tell." In Makassar, Abdul pointed out how he felt uncomfortable (risih) hanging out in parks because of "people’s stares. You can’t embrace, you can’t do anything together in public." For Abdul and some other gay men, discos are where they first entered the gay world. Though married to a woman and the father of a child by the latter stages of my fieldwork, when I first knew him Abdul was a bachelor and heavily involved in the gay world. Attracted to men since elementary school, as a child he didn’t know the word gay, only banci. By his early teens he knew the term gay "from reading magazines all the time … women’s magazines like Femina and Populer." However, he only began socializing with other gay men in high school after stumbling upon a particular disco: "what I knew was that it was a crowded disco; I didn’t know that it was special for gay men and warias."

### Domestic Sites: Salons, Homes, and Koses

While the home is generally a place where gayness must be hidden, gay men forge sites of gay subjectivity in ostensibly domestic places, the best-known of which are salons, homes, and koses (rented rooms). Gay men can be opened in them only if the salon provides a welcoming atmosphere; usually this means the salon in question is owned and/or operated by a gay man or waria. Such salons can become so well known in the gay

world that they are listed as tempat ngebers in gay zines. Salon work is a common line of employment for gay men and warias, and most Indonesians know that warias (and gay men, to the extent they distinguish the two subject positions) can be found in salons. Gay men drop into such salons at all hours of the day as clients or visitors, gossiping about everything from sexual escapades to romantic squabbles. Salons are an important venue by which knowledge of the gay world (including gay language) crosses, however fitfully, into Indonesian popular culture.

Since simple salons are often physically connected to homes, the dividing line between salon and home can be indistinct. Like most Indonesians, gay men rarely live alone. Many gay men spend time at the homes of gay friends and lovers despite the presence of parents, siblings, or a wife. For gay men who even fear being seen in discos, homes are the only places they can live out their sexual subjectivities. This is particularly true for upper-class men, who often look down upon the predominantly lower-class users of tempat ngebers (one upper-class gay man confessed that he sometimes drove by a tempat ngeber—with his car windows rolled up). Thus the widespread segregation along lines of class and status in Indonesia persists in the gay world (cf. Howard 1996:265). The larger homes of the wealthy make it easier to find space with some gay friends away from other members of the household. The difficulty is that it is educated, wealthier families who are more likely to know what gay means. In more lower-class households, gay visitors can socialize with little fear of discovery. I have seen drag show rehearsals and HIV prevention rap groups with twenty gay participants take place in a gay man’s home without the host’s parents understanding what was happening. Sometimes a gay couple can live together in the home of one of their families without raising suspicion, as in the case of Nyoman and Bagus above, or a married gay men can have a male partner live in the home without his wife understanding that he and the partner are lovers (see chapter 4). One gay man recalled how he and his former lover shared a life: "Most of the time we were at his house, because his mother was nice and would say ‘just stay here tonight and be a friend to my son.’ So that whole time we were together we never had our own place. We had to be careful; even if we were fighting because of a broken promise or something, we had to keep our voices down so no one would hear."

If his wealth is great enough, a gay man can occasionally live alone in a home without family members, avoiding marriage or living separated from his wife. Such homes may become well-known sites in the gay world, though their use is limited by who is on friendly terms with the owner. On one occasion during my Surabaya fieldwork, over forty gay men crowded inside the home of a wealthy gay man to celebrate his birthday. In the living room we chatted and watched Western porn videos (a rare treat for

most gay Indonesians) with the sound turned off while others held Muslim evening prayers in a bedroom. No one seemed to find this juxtaposition of sex and religion worthy of commentary. Sitting on the floor eating dessert in the living room, one man turned to me and said: "Let’s not bother going to Texas tonight! This is much more fun!"

The term kos is sometimes translated as "apartment," but this is a misnomer since most koses are single unfurnished rooms no more than ten feet on a side, with shared bathing and cooking facilities. A rumah kos or "kos house" can be a dormitory-like building composed of koses, or a series of koses added to a house where the landlord’s family lives. Even if there are no other known gay boarders, the relative lack of social ties between boarders can make a gay man’s kos a safe haven that other gay men regularly visit. Such koses are some of the most ubiquitous nodes of the gay world. Occasionally gay men live in koses located near each other, as in the case of Ridwan, who lived with his parents in a large house with eleven small koses on the second floor. Ridwan’s parents owned a second residence out of town, spending only one or two nights a week at the house. Ridwan was left to act as landlord:

This house has had lots of gay men and one lesbi woman living here for the last three months; eight out of the eleven boarders now! What happened was that the other people would move out because they married or found work elsewhere, so there were lots of empty rooms. And it spread by word of mouth, "You should board at Ridwan’s place." … I said, "Okay, we can gather here together, we can take care of each other." … If they have a problem with their boyfriends or whatever, they come to me. It’s like one of those sitcoms on television.

### Rural/Urban Dynamics

A major factor in the rural gay world’s existence is that rural Indonesians have become avid media consumers; it is by no means unusual to find rural homes with dirt floors and no running water, but enough electricity for a handful of light bulbs and a television set. Given the key role mass media play in gay subjectivities, it should not be surprising that gay men can be found even in small villages. While many rural gay men move to cities, others remain in their villages of origin because they are caring for a relative, have married a woman and do not wish to be separated from their family, or do not like urban life. Others engage in cyclical migration, living in a kos in the city and returning to the village on a regular basis.

In rural areas, malls and town squares either do not exist or are too small for hanging out beyond the earshot of passersby. As a result, salons are important sites of the rural gay world; there exist salons run and frequented by gay men surrounded by nothing but rice fields. However, in

both Java and Sulawesi (and, I suspect, elsewhere in Indonesia), certain villages have become known as places where men have sex with each other; gay men sometimes come from such villages and these villages are also sometimes visited by gay men from nearby cities. One gay man from outside Surabaya noted that "in my village sometimes there are men who live with each other and have sex with each other. One is a man and one is a banci; everyone knows about it and it isn’t seen as a problem or a sin. Eventually the man marries, but often the banci does not." When visiting one such village I was impressed by the way men joked openly about sexual practices with other men. However, even in such circumstances it is assumed all men will eventually marry.

### Events

Beyond sites like tempat ngebers, malls, and salons are events (acara, pertemuan, show). These are time-delimited but important elements of the gay world. Events with up to a thousand attendees occasionally take place in large cities, and smaller events with a handful of performers and fewer than thirty gay men in the audience occur even in rural environments. Set apart from the rhythm of daily life and requiring a level of planning not found in the more regularized patronage of tempat ngebers and discos, events invite explicit commentary on topics like authenticity and belonging. There have been skits performed at discos in Surabaya, for instance, where the story revolves around love and separation, and the lead characters are named gaya (style) or nusa (island).

One well-known gay event is September Ceria (Joyous September), held near Solo; when I attended in 1997 the event had taken place every year since 1989, drawing spectators from across Java and occasionally beyond. For several weeks before September Ceria in 1997, gay men hanging out at Texas and elsewhere talked excitedly about the event, and as the time drew near, small groups of them made their way toward Solo on buses or trains. The event took place in a resort village outside the city, on the slopes of a volcano extending up to ten thousand feet. On the day before the event, the village was full of gay men strolling around between the small hotels where they were staying four or more to a room. Friends from distant cities greeted each other with hugs, and the dress all around was sharp: tight white T-shirts, jeans, smooth silk button-down shirts. But not everyone was outside, because at 4:30 P.M. local time the casket of Princess Diana began its procession toward Westminster. In every hotel room men watched the television intently, gossiping about the attractiveness of Elton John’s lover, a tantalizing glimpse of the Western gay world. By 6:45 P.M. the coverage ended and we left the hotel room in darkness, walking up to the large, high-ceilinged concrete-and-glass hall

where September Ceria would take place. Over six hundred gay men together with a few lesbi women and warias waited outside: excitement was in the air, and it was clear that most had never been in the company of so many gay men at once. I purchased my ticket for 15,000 rupiah right before the doors opened at 7 P.M. The gay men from Solo who organized the event informed the guests that (as in years past) photography was forbidden. One attendee from Surabaya whispered under his breath: "Why are they so worried about being exposed? They are so closed."

The hall was filled with chairs, the stage at one end decorated with white steps topped with five Greek columns and bouquets of plastic flowers. Attendees took their seats as the program began with an introduction from the emcees—Ardi, a gay man from Surabaya, and Maria, a gay man from Jakarta famous for his dressing up as a woman. Maria’s glossy painted nails flashed under the lights as he exchanged mile-a-minute jokes with Ardi and then performed playback to a pop song. Afterward, Ardi stuffed money in Maria’s bosom in appreciation of his performance, joking that he had considered doing the same in "back" (slapping Maria’s rear end for emphasis) but was afraid because "who knows what’s authentic (asli) and what isn’t!"

Suddenly the sounds of Richard Strauss’s Also Sprach Zarathustra filled the air. All eyes turned to the back of the hall as Toni, the head of the organizing committee from Solo, moved toward the stage, looking down imperiously from a golden throne resting upon the shoulders of four beefy, bare-chested men in golden loincloths. Upon reaching the stage, Toni stepped off the throne and read a short speech, expressing hope that the audience, who he referred to as senasib (of one fate) and sehati (of one heart), would enjoy the evening’s events. Following over two hours of performances by gay men from across Java and Bali, Ardi appeared on stage to make a few comments. Noting that both performers and attendees had come from all over Indonesia, he repeated the nationalist saying, "From Sabang to Merauke we become one."5

### Organizations

Events are the most common type of organizational work in which gay men engage: very few participate in activism as that term is usually used in the West. This near absence of political work is one reason why gay Indonesians remain quite invisible to Westerners and normal Indonesians. The organizational and activist work that does exist, however, certainly affects the gay world. Gay men have been organizing since quite soon after the gay subject position was probably first formed in the archipelago. Most of the largest and longest-lasting gay organizations are on Java, but substantial organizations have arisen in many other parts of Indonesia.

While not representative of the lives or interests of most gay men, gay organizations have engaged in a range of activities from telephone counseling hotlines to a wide variety of HIV prevention programs; they have played a crucial role in creating entertainment events and fostering gay zines, volleyball clubs, and other activities that build a sense of local and national sociality.

The first gay organization to publicly proclaim itself was Lambda Indonesia, which in 1982 began publishing a zine and holding events in Surabaya, and which quickly gained members from other areas (Ary 1987:52). The successor organization to Lambda Indonesia, GAYa Nusantara, remains the best-known gay organization and plays an important role in articulating a sense of national belonging for organizations across the archipelago. The phrase GAYa Nusantara indexes (1) an organization based in Surabaya, (2) a nationally distributed zine produced by (1), and (3) a national network for which (1) is the clearinghouse. Each term in the phrase GAYa Nusantara has two meanings. Gaya is Indonesian for "style," but the unusual capitalization highlights its similarity to "gay." Nusantara means both "archipelago" and is an everyday term for "Indonesia." The phrase can thus be parsed in four ways (since in Indonesian adjectives follow nouns, while in English they precede them): "archipelago style," "archipelago gay," "Indonesia style," and "Indonesia gay."

This multilevel aspect of the term is illustrated in figure 5-1, the August 1994 cover of the magazine GAYa Nusantara. The image shows two gay men wearing Muslim topi hats. The man on the left carries the Indonesian flag (red on top, white on the bottom) while the man on the right carries the rainbow flag that has become an international symbol for gay men and lesbians (which has two small vertical red and white strips at its base, recalling the Indonesian flag). While the term GAYa Nusantara is by no means used or even known to all Indonesians who identify as gay, it manifests a common conception of gay subjectivity as national in scope. Many gay groups name themselves "GAYa X": GAYa Semarang in the city of Semarang in Java, GAYa Betawi in Jakarta (Betawi is an old name for Jakarta and its ethnolocalized inhabitants), GAYa PRIAngan in Bandung (Priangan is a local term; the first four letters are capitalized to evoke pria, Indonesian for "male"), GAYa Celebes in Makassar (Celebes is the French term for the island of Sulawesi), the former GAYa Intim in Ambon, GAYa Siak in the city of Pekanbaru in Sumatra (the Siak is a major river in the province), GAYa Dewata in Bali (dewata is Indonesian for "gods," and in contemporary Indonesia Bali is termed the "island of the gods" or Pulau Dewata), GAYa Khatulistiwa in the city of Pontianak, near the equator in Kalimantan (Khatulistiwa is Indonesian for "equator"), GAYa Tepian Samarinda in the city of Samarinda in Kalimantan, and others. A gay group on the island of Batam near Singapore, Bagasy, changed its name to GAYa Batam in the late 1990s, marking more clearly its place in the national gay archipelago. Several lesbi organizations have also used GAYa or other terms to link themselves to this network. Since adjectives follow nouns in Indonesian, this pattern ontologizes the national; the "local" term appears as modifier of GAYa, incorporating the state’s "attempt to construct local identity in such a way that it can be encompassed by national culture" (Keane 1997:38).



Figure 5–1. Sexuality and nation intersecting. GAYa Nusantara 32 (August 1994), cover illustration.

The activities of gay organizations differ in several respects from dominant Western models. Gay organizations rarely engage in work whose goal is social rights or visibility; most focus on entertainment and social activities. Gay men who participate in organizations rarely see their goal as changing social norms or find the notion of visibility compelling. Many members of gay organizations, even their leaders, are married to women or plan to get married in the future. Gay men who contribute time and

energy to gay organizations (they are rarely paid) sometimes say they are aktif or refer to themselves as an aktivis but more commonly identify as a member (anggota) or participant (peserta) in an organization. Organizations tend to be small, with three to eight core members, and many cease to exist after a few years. Those that are able to survive for longer periods have usually obtained international funding, generally linked to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. Gay organizations engage in such work out of a real concern about HIV/AIDS and a sense that doing good deeds proves that they are worthy of inclusion in national society. While linkages to transnational HIV/AIDS discourse undoubtedly shape gay subjectivity (for instance, the rise in the early 2000s of the concept lelaki suka lelaki or LSL, based upon "men who have sex with men" or MSM), such discourse is not how gay men come to gay subjectivity and does not play a major role in shaping the gay world. Among other things, this reflects the reality that funding for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment in Indonesia remains relatively minor and the profile of HIV/AIDS organizations quite low.

The struggles gay organizations face reflect the "tactical" geography of the gay world; except for a handful of organizations with HIV/AIDS-related funding who can rent an office, meetings typically must take place in homes or koses, and problems arise if no such places are available or if conflicts develop between the lucky person with a place to meet and others. It testifies to the crucial role of place in gay subjectivity that organizations often arise from tempat ngebers rather than the other way around. In 1993 an organization came into being in one of my field sites when a group of men who knew each other from a tempat ngeber began meeting in my rented room. In a different city an organization began with a group of gay men who rented koses in the boarding house described earlier: "We had a group of people at this place, so we thought ‘why not become an organization?’" Some organizations even incorporate tempat ngebers into their names.

### The Working World

Warias hold a limited range of occupations (salon work, bridal makeup, sex work), and at work they remain visibly waria. In contrast, the working world is almost never part of a gay man’s gay world unless he works in a salon. When in the gay world, gay men often avoid speaking about how they earn a living, since they wish to keep the normal and gay worlds distinct. Gay men who have high-paying jobs in corporate management exist, and mass media usually conflate gay men with the kalangan ekseutif or "executive classes." However, because they come to their sexual subjectivities through mass media rather than travel to the West or reading English-language

magazines, gay men can be from any class and most are rather poor even in Indonesian terms. Although detailed survey work on the class backgrounds of gay men has not yet been conducted, about 90 percent of gay men I interviewed during one fieldwork period (1997–1998) made under 500,000 rupiah a month (about 100 dollars at the time), many much less. Very few gay men I encountered during my fieldwork owned a car, and most did not even own a motorcycle. If living separate from their families, most gay men live in koses; few own their own homes. The jobs of gay men have the same range as other Indonesian men, from street sweeper to elementary school teacher, pharmacist, salesman in a motorcycle dealership, hotel worker, and store cashier. As is the case for other Indonesians, there is a fair amount of unemployment and underemployment among gay men.

## GEOGRAPHIES OF THE LESBI WORLD

As noted earlier, the gay and lesbi subject positions took form around the same time, as gendered analogues of a "desire for the same." However, while both gay men and lesbi women sometimes speak of a single "gay and lesbi world" and cogendered sociality certainly exists (see below), the lesbi world is generally distinct from the gay world. This reflects the widespread gender segregation in Indonesia: socialization between men and women connotes sexual impropriety unless carefully managed.

A theme in lesbi narratives is the difficulty they face in meeting others "like themselves." Gay men also speak of isolation and invisibility, but not so consistently and emphatically. The most fundamental issue is that lesbi women have difficulty accessing public or civic space, even in the "tactical" way that gay men do, because generally they cannot leave the home (particularly at night) unless in the company of a male guardian. This is not an absolute prohibition. Women in much of Southeast Asia have historically had significant freedom of movement, often due to market activities or agricultural work (Reid 1988). While the aristocratic nationalist figure Kartini complained of confinement during the late colonial era, nonelite women have often been expected to move about outside their homes. However, this is extended primarily to married and older women, and nowhere in Indonesia is it considered acceptable for an unaccompanied woman to spend a couple hours at night hanging out in a park. Were a woman to do so, she would risk bringing shame to her family by being seen as a prostitute or perek (an abbreviation for perempuan eksperimen or "experimenting woman").

Across Indonesia, tombois have somewhat more freedom of movement than ceweks: "[tombois] go out alone, especially at night, which is men’s

prerogative" (Blackwood 1999:188). This is particularly the case if their appearance is so masculine that they are mistaken for men on the street. Even so, parents or husbands may limit their time away from home. Tombois speak of rivalries over their cewek partners as a major barrier to sociality between tombois. There are few social activities to bring tombois together along the lines of the shows and contests of waria and gay life. Ceweks find it easier to move about in the company of a tomboi; in Menguak Duniaku, the tomboi Hen talks about how he can move about with a cewek after dark because people "see how my presentation reflects the character and attitude [sifat dan sikap] of a man" (Prawirakusumah and Ramadhan 1988:280). While a few upper-class tombois own cars, most tombois drive motorcycles or take public transport.

Given the restrictions on women’s movement in civic space, it is not surprising that tempat ngebers, such important sites of gay subjectivity, do not exist for lesbi women. The primary sites of lesbi subjectivity are homes or semiprivate civic spaces like shopping malls, cinemas, coffee shops, salons, or restaurants, as in the story from northern Bali in chapter 1. Menguak Duniaku shows the lesbi world in the western Javanese city of Bandung to be composed primarily of semiprivate civic spaces, a pattern similar to lesbi geographies elsewhere: "A few months ago I was always spending my Saturday nights with Dewi. Whether it was going to the movies, sitting together in a restaurant, or going to a friend’s party" (Prawirakusumah and Ramadhan 1988:239). On another occasion the tomboi protagonist reminisces about places he would go with a former lover: "We’d go study [at each others’ homes], go to the bookstore looking for schoolbooks, to the mosque every Friday morning, to movies, to friend’s parties" (1988:66). The upper-class characters in more recent lesbi fiction move in similar spaces (Herlinatiens 2003; Kartini 2003; Ratri 2000). Since the early 1990s the relatively enclosed, private spaces of discos have become sites of lesbi subjectivity in some Indonesian cities.

Like the gay world, the lesbi world is constructed by forging rooms of one’s own in the space of another. Indeed, the lesbi world is more tactical than the gay world; its sites are less distinguished from those of the normal world. Keeping the lesbi world safely separated from the normal world presents challenges. Lesbi women are aided by patterns of gender segregation in Indonesia: men tend to socialize with men and women with women. This does not solve the problem of prying female family members, and at home men are often present as well. For instance, Tina and Tri were a lesbi couple who lived together in Tina’s house, tucked down a side alley on the outskirts of Denpasar where houses become interspersed with rice fields. They had to be on guard since Tina’s brother lived in the house but was unaware that his sister and Tri were lesbi, much less

that they were lovers; gay and lesbi friends were led to a back room out of earshot.

While gay men or warias may encounter violence, it plays a special role in the lesbi world. Many lesbi women have direct or indirect experience of violence at the hands of fathers, husbands, brothers, or other male family members. That the lesbi world is comparatively oriented around the home makes this threat of violence difficult to escape. One of my upper-class lesbi interlocutors was hit in the jaw by her older brother so strongly that she had to be hospitalized; the family also tried to have her committed to a psychiatric hospital. The tomboi protagonist of Menguak Duniaku is locked up for several months in such a hospital.

While images of "criminal" lower-class lesbi women were quite common in popular Indonesian mass media during the 1980s, by the 1990s the dominant stereotype among both Indonesians and Westerners was that lesbi women were upper class. The image is that of the career woman or entertainment figure, living in Jakarta, for whom sex with women is another sign of foreign contamination and excessive modernity. While rich lesbi women certainly exist, they seem to represent the segment of lesbi women most visible to outsiders rather than a numerically or discursively dominant group. As is the case for gay men, lesbi geographies are class specific, and the worlds of poor lesbi women and wealthy lesbi women have little in common (A. Murray 1999).

State discourse presents Indonesia as neither becoming a nation of millionaires nor forever mired in poverty, but a nation of "prosperous" middle-class households centered on the heterosexual conjugal pair. The new middle class is highly gendered: "gender relations are central to the making of middle classes and modernity in [Southeast Asia]…. in particular, the development of elaborate new femininities based on the consumer/wife/mother and the consumer/beautiful young woman in the region can be seen as central to the very development of these burgeoning economies" (Stivens 1998:1, 5). As for gay men, lesbi middle-class subjectivity must be understood in terms of "mode of consumption": "the economic forces which have produced the new ‘middle classes’ of affluent Asia have had transformative effects for people not directly benefiting from being members of an urban rich or self-consciously modern stratum…. One does not have to have a high disposable income to desire consumption of new commodities, or to aspire to associated lifestyles" (Robinson 1998:63).

Since most Indonesians cannot distinguish lesbi women from normal women, they work anywhere other women do, from club deejay to restaurant waitress to office manager. There are feminine lesbi women who engage in sex work (with male clients). Survival in the working world usually means not telling anyone one is lesbi. This is also true for lesbi women

who are married to men and work as housewives; these probably form the largest category of lesbi labor. Due to their visibly nonnormative gender practices, tombois face a more limited range of career options than ceweks and sometimes work in traditionally male domains like driving a taxi. Many tombois are unemployed, but even poor tombois do not usually engage in sex work, since they do not fit dominant conceptions of female beauty. Like warias, however, some tombois work in salons, even though they do not wear makeup or have feminine hairstyles. Tombois say they obtain salon work because salons have a reputation for employing persons who do not conform to gender norms, and also because it permits interacting with women clients with whom they can potentially have sexual relationships.

A handful of lesbi organizations have existed, based mostly in Jakarta (with one predominantly lower-class lesbi HIV/AIDS organization in Makassar), but their activities have been limited due to their relative exclusion from HIV/AIDS-related funding and difficulties in finding a place to meet. Whereas some gay men are able to access transnational gay networks through HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs, lesbi women’s linkages to the transnational (beyond mass media) are largely limited to women’s rights networks; in some cases such women first enter these networks while in college abroad rather than in Indonesia itself.

## INTERSECTIONS OF THE GAY AND LESBI WORLDS

Across Indonesia, men and women tend to socialize in single-gender groups and remain segregated in daily life. It is relatively rare (but becoming more common) for men and women not related through kinship or marriage to spend time with each other outside carefully delimited contexts of school or work. In such environments it is to be expected that lesbi women spend time mostly with other lesbi women, and gay men with other gay men.

However, instances of cogendered sociality across Indonesia beg explanation. A gay man who owns a salon in Bandung rents out a front room to a lesbi couple, which they use as a photography studio. In Surabaya, Rita, a tomboi, emphasizes that gay language is "for our group alone, so we can talk without other people understanding." One night Rita and I were in a taxi en route to the Sensation disco with Rano, a gay man. They fell to talking and Rano said: "I feel so sorry for lesbi women. We have to pity them, because they’re so closed." Rita nodded her assent. I added, "Yeah, it’s so hard for lesbi women to meet," and Rita replied, "Yes, we meet mostly at each other’s homes." I mentioned that at the home of a certain waria "It’s nice that gay men, lesbi women, and warias are to gether.

Why doesn’t that happen everywhere?" Rita answered "It used to be like that: lesbi women and gay men were together." Rano added: "Around 1990 it ended, because some authentic men [laki-laki asli] pretended to be gay. They used it as a ruse to get at the lesbi women. So we became separated." I asked, "Was this just in Surabaya?" and Rita replied, "I think it happened all over East Java." Just as memories of "traditional" Java were constructed through the encounter with colonial modernity (Pemberton 1994), this example shows how gay men and lesbi women can imagine a past in which they were a single community, rather than seeing gay and lesbi as having distinct ontologies.

In Surabaya and Makassar, gay zines have published lesbi zines as inserts, allowing them to benefit from the gay zine’s larger distribution network. In Makassar, a gay organization grew to include not only warias but lesbi women as staff and clients. In northern Bali, Ita’s family’s restaurant was a gathering place not only for lesbi women but for gay men and warias, and lesbi women would visit gay men and warias at their own homes and salons. One afternoon Tuti invited a respected gay man and several warias to a meeting in her family’s souvenir shop. Everyone moved racks of batik clothing and carved wooden fruit to the sides of the shop, clearing a space in the middle to sit. Tuti began by thanking everyone for attending, saying, "It’s good that we’re all meeting here together, lesbi women, gay men, and warias, because we’re all of the same fate [senasib], of the same soul [sejiwa]." It was decided that a new organization would be created for northern Bali that would network with gay men and lesbi women in southern Bali, and that the organization would have three chairs—one lesbi woman, one gay man, and one waria.

Without multiplying examples further, it is clear that the geographies of the gay and lesbi worlds can intersect. This is not a function of wealth or urbanity; there appears to be more cogendered sociality in rural areas, where networks are smaller and thus less likely to become distinct. When gay men and lesbi women do socialize it is on the more restricted terms of the lesbi world: not in parks at night but in salons (where gay men and lesbi women often work together) or at homes. Lesbi women have been involved with male-dominated gay groups in many different contexts. This was first documented in the article "Welcome Sisters!" by Dédé Oetomo, which appeared in Gaya Hidup Ceria in July 1983. The article recounts that the organization Lambda Indonesia was founded by Oetomo and five other men on March 1, 1981, and that in May of that year the women’s magazine Sarinah interviewed the group. Lambda Indonesia received a large number of letters from women, including lesbi-identified women, in the wake of the Sarinah reportage.6 In lesbi zines lesbi women can speak of a "gay and lesbi movement" (e.g., MitraS, Nov. 1997:8) or judge lesbi women to be politically infantile compared to "our gay male

compatriots, our older siblings" (Gaya LEStari 3:9; in GAYa Nusantara, July 1994).

To my knowledge no lesbi women are unaware of the existence of gay men, or vice versa. Mass media as well as gay and lesbi Indonesians themselves speak frequently of homoseks and homosexualitas in terms that unite gay men and lesbi women. In southern Bali, Kari once explained that "lesbi means the same as gay, it’s only the type [jenis] that differs." In a meeting between gay men and lesbi women in Makassar, Karim spoke of gay men and lesbi women as of "the same fate"—the same term, senasib, used by the lesbi woman Tuti in Bali and the gay man Ardi at September Ceria—and also as having a single emotional state (seperasaan) and vision (kesamaan visi).

The language of unity that permeates these understandings of cogendered sociality recalls nationalist tropes of unity across difference, as canonized in the nationalist Youth Pledge of 1928: one nation, one people, one language. For gay and lesbi Indonesians, sociality across a gendered divide can be sustained in terms of a shared "desire for the same." The resonances between a sense of cogendered sociality and national discourse indicate that this assumption of sharedness is not simply due to notions of gender complementarity that can be found in many "traditional" cultures of the archipelago. It also has to do with the dubbing culture by which the gay and lesbi subject positions took form, and the continuing importance of mass media in gay and lesbi subjectivities. Concepts of gayness and lesbianness have for the most part translocated to Indonesia together: the gay and lesbi subject positions originated around the same time through the same process. In Indonesia, homosexuality has implied heterosociality.

## GAY AND LESBI ARCHIPELAGOES

The dominant belief in contemporary Indonesia is that sexual and gendered subjectivities are to be clearly embodied. Gay and lesbi subjectivities, however, pivot around a homosexual desire that is not immediately visible. They do not just have different geographies from normal and waria Indonesians; their geographies have different meanings. On many occasions in all my field sites, a gay man would invite me and some gay friends to his family’s home but warn us not to be effeminate because his mother, wife, brother, or neighbors did not know he was gay. Warias do not request such discretion because others typically know they are waria. Yet it is possible for twenty gay men to gather in the living room of a gay friend who lives with his parents and siblings and discuss how difficult it

is to tell one’s parents one is gay while the mother and sisters offer drinks to the guests. "They just think we are all friends," one guest said.

For no gay and lesbi Indonesian is the gay or lesbi world their whole world. Despite the many years that homosexuality has appeared in Indonesian mass media, most Indonesians do not have a clear understanding of male or female "desire for the same"; they know primarily of warias. These worlds are not the spatially and culturally contiguous units that constitute the settings for traditional ethnographic work, nor the transnational circuits assumed to constitute "globalization." The notion of a gay or lesbian "community," which suffers from definitional confusion in the West, makes even less sense in Indonesia. There is no Indonesian term for "community"; the closest glosses are probably masyarakat (society), himpunan (association, as in a "community of scholars"), kampung ("village" or "quarter"), and the as-yet rarely used loanword komunitas. Gay men never use himpunan or kampung to refer to themselves, and they consistently use masyarakat to refer to society in general, as in the phrase "we are not yet accepted by society" (kita belum diterima oleh masyarakat). When referring to themselves collectively, gay men are most likely to speak of a gay "people" using the terms kaum or bangsa, which usually refer to dispersed social groups like Muslims (kaum Muslim) or nationals (bangsa Indonesia).

The splintered and marginalized worlds of gay and lesbi Indonesians do not correspond to "community" in Redfield’s (1995) classic sense of the term as a localized, distinctive, homogeneous group, or as used in Western gender and sexuality studies, where it refers to interpersonal relationships, shared values, commercial venues like bookstores and bars, and social service or activist organizations. This lack of institutional support or social recognition means that the gay and lesbi worlds are seen as incomplete and on some level incapable of sustaining a full life. This is why Howard’s gay interlocutors in Jakarta could describe the gay world as fulfilling but also "a dangerous and disorderly place, where those who stayed too long could be destroyed emotionally, financially, and sometimes spiritually" (1996:178).

Through their everyday interactions, gay and lesbi Indonesians create the gay and lesbi worlds over and over again at the center of the normal world, not its periphery—in centers of consumer life like malls, centers of domestic life like homes, and, for gay men, centers of civic life like parks. When gay and lesbi Indonesians hang out in a corner of a park or a friend’s home, a piece of the globe becomes part of the gay and lesbi worlds. Subjectivity shapes place. And place shapes subjectivity, as exemplified in how gay men (and lesbi women) often employ deictics, referring to themselves as "people like this" (orang begini), "members of here" (anggota di sini), "people like that" (orang begitu), or "people like here"

(orang kayak sini). These are exophoric categorizations; unlike anaphoric pronouns whose reference is to an item in the linguistic chain (as in "Sally gave Joe a shirt. He liked it"), for these terms the reference point is outside language (as in "That table is blue"). Some gay men feel they become gay only in certain places: when I asked one frequent visitor to Texas, "Would you call yourself gay or homo?" he answered, "Yeah, words like that are used here often, but in other places [tempat lain] it’s different."

Such geographical transformations make it possible for a gay man in Bali to say that "[gay men] might become friends in particular places [tempat tertentu] like the tempat ngeber at the town square, but then if we meet in a public place [tempat umum] like a movie theater or a supermarket, we pretend like we don’t know each other." A town square—usually a prime example of a public place—is here reframed as part of the gay world: through the agency of gay men, a "tempat umum" becomes a "tempat tertentu."

The relationship between gay and lesbi Indonesians and place recalls not only how historically "privacy could only be had in public" for gay men in New York (Chauncey 1994), but the more general Western dynamic by which "public vs. private does not refer to properties inherent in any locale, so much as it specifies two different interpretations … of the visibility or accessibility of a particular locale" (Leap 1999:9). The places of the gay and lesbi worlds are literal "subject positions" shaping the selfhoods of those inhabiting them. In the West the phrase "the gay world" has existed historically and at present, but there is no evidence that this translocated to Indonesia. The mass mediated messages have been too fragmentary; after all, dunia is an Arabic "loanword" that in standard Indonesian refers to nonlocalized social phenomena: the world of Islam, the world of fashion. The channels of globalization once again turn out to be dubbed, linked to popular culture and national discourse rather than international gay and lesbian human rights activism or gay and lesbian tourism.

The gay and lesbi worlds are not ethnolocalized: they seem to be conceptualized as localities connected in a national network that is in turn part of a global network. This queerscape or homoscape (Ingram 1997; Parker 1999) is a complex grid of similitude and difference that references not "tradition" but the nation: while gay and lesbi persons identify in ethnic terms in many respects, with reference to their gayness or lesbiness they are Indonesians. In addition, the gay and lesbi worlds invoke the transnational despite the near absence of Westerners in them. Such indirect and fragmented linkages to globality recall nothing so much as the dubbing culture relationship between mass media and gay and lesbi subjectivities. This can be seen in the terms "gay" and "lesbi" themselves, and in tempat ngeber names like Texas, Kalifor, Paris, Brasil, and Pattaya

in Surabaya, Manhattan in Solo, LA and Paris in Yogyakarta, or Texas in Mataram on the island of Lombok (which probably indexes both the West’s and Surabaya’s Texas). Global imaginings are not unique to tempat ngebers named after non-Indonesian sites, but they provide clear examples of them. When gay men in Texas speak of being a "person of here" or "from Texas" (dari Texas), they reference a "here" that is simultaneously a "there," a "here" caught up in imagined communities both national and global. A commonality between gay and lesbi Indonesians is that in general, what fascination the gay and lesbian West holds for them stems from a perception that it is familiar, not exotic. Feminist geographers have long noted a widespread "association between the feminine and the local" (Massey 1994:9); inhabitants of the lesbi world challenge this association as they think of themselves in national and transnational terms. Gay men may imagine that the Texas in the United States is more opened than Texas in Surabaya, or lesbi women may imagine that discos with lesbian patrons are ubiquitous in Europe, but these are seen as distinctions of degree, not kind.

There is a very specific grid of similitude and difference at work: it is as if the gay and lesbi worlds are islands in a national gay and lesbi archipelago, and on another level that archipelago is one island in a global archipelago of homosexuality. This archipelago metaphor does not originate in "tradition": as discussed in chapter 7, since 1957 state ideology has explicitly proclaimed Indonesia a nation organized by the archipelago concept (wawasan nusantara). Gay and lesbi Indonesians dub the archipelago concept in conceptualizing their worlds as isolated places linked into constellations or networks of affiliation. This is an implicit blurring of domains: I have never heard a gay man or lesbi woman refer to a tempat ngeber or café as an island, yet it appears that the various elements of their gay worlds are construed implicitly as islands in a gay and lesbi archipelago.

How can such a largely unspoken leakage from one cultural domain (nation) to another (sexuality) take place in Indonesia, the "East Indies"? To answer this question it is productive to turn to work on the "West Indies," the Caribbean, where the concept of cultural transformation is a familiar theme. Mintz and Price’s (1976) classic study of African American culture responds to an intellectual milieu in which two unsatisfactory interpretations of African American culture predominated: (1) due to the tremendous dislocations and oppressions of the slave trade, African American culture had originated solely in the New World and there was nothing particularly "African" about it, and (2) scholarship could uncover "retentions and survivals" from Africa, which made African American culture "African." These two interpretations participate in the same Western conceptualization of similitude and difference that, as noted in

chapter 1, inform the reductionisms of "Gay Planet" versus "McGay." Mintz and Price, drawing from Herskovits, developed the idea of a "cultural grammar" that could be shared even if surface manifestations differed, just as related but mutually unintelligible languages can share grammatical features: "though ‘witchcraft’ may figure importantly in the social life of one group and be absent from that of its neighbor, both peoples may still subscribe to the widely held African principle that social conflict can produce illness or misfortune" (10).

The influence of the archipelago concept on the gay and lesbi worlds is mostly covert. These worlds are not "mapped" as archipelagoes because the idea of culture as cognitive map is an artifact of the researcher’s position as outsider: "it is the analogy which occurs to an outsider who has to find his way around in a foreign landscape and who compensates for his lack of practical mastery … by the use of a model of all possible routes" (Bourdieu 1977:2). The tactical way in which the gay and lesbi worlds are built up through practice—innumerable daily acts of hanging out, visiting a salon, going to a disco, watching television at a friend’s kos—means they are experienced processually. The impact of the state’s archipelago concept can be seen in the conceptualization of the gay and lesbi worlds as distributed networks of places: homes, shopping malls, salons, and tempat ngebers like Texas or Kalifor (fig. 5-2) are like islands in an archipelago.

The state’s archipelago concept has as its central goal the creation of unity from ethnolocalized diversity. State rhetoric often lexicalizes this ideal through terms based on "one" (satu), as in the phrase "unity and integrity" (persatuan dan kesatuan) or the verbal form (me)nyatu (unify). This shapes how the gay and lesbi worlds have never to date been ethnolocalized—there has never been a specifically Javanese or Sundanese or Makassarese tempat ngeber or salon (or slang or zine). There is no evidence for the idea that, say, two tempat ngebers in Surabaya—Texas and Kalifor—might be for Javanese and Balinese persons, respectively. One finds instead commentary like that of the gay man from Surabaya who explained his love of tempat ngebers as follows: "It’s always a sense of being close, caring, it’s like that, because although there are some different characteristics … personal matters, we’ll meet in a town square and feel ‘oh, we’re already close.’ So we quickly unify [menyatu]—although we’re Bugis, we’re Javanese, still we quickly unify." Lesbi women articulate subjectivities that presume being tomboi or cewek is to participate in a network of affiliation that is not ethnolocalized but both national and transnational. Indeed, given that terms like "tomboy" are used worldwide while waria is understood as a specifically Indonesian concept, lesbi women may be more imbricated with global discourses of gender and sexuality than gay men.

 

Figure 5–2. "Kalifornia," a bridge in downtown Surabaya. GAYa Nusantara 29 (May 1994:28).

My hypothesis is that gay and lesbi Indonesians draw cultural logics from both the archipelagic spatial metaphor of the state and its "family principle." This conjunction of nation and sexuality shapes the desire to marry "heterosexually," the sense that gay and lesbi are nationwide subjectivities (that is, found throughout the archipelago, though not necessarily everywhere in the archipelago), and the sense that these subjectivities nonetheless do not really belong. The archipelago concept represents a powerfully institutionalized, nonethnolocalized rubric for conceptualizing "desire for the same" in terms of unity.

The gay and lesbi worlds are isomorphic with Indonesia. They stretch "from Sabang to Merauke," as Ardi put it during September Ceria—though they do not cover every point in between, as a continental rather than archipelago imaginary would imply. One gay man in Makassar tried to describe what being "opened" meant by saying "openness is between our groups" (keterbukaan di antara kalangan kita). In speaking of openness as between (di antara) rather than within (di dalam) "our groups," he evoked a geography in which the gay and lesbi worlds exist as a distributed network of realms; that is, as an archipelago.

The gay and lesbi worlds cannot be explained as products of a top-down globalization where a "Gay International" imposes homosexual identities on the non-Western Other. They are linked but distinct geographies of "desire for the same." State hegemony shapes gay and lesbi subjectivities, yet gay and lesbi Indonesians rework that hegemony in unexpected ways. This is simultaneously a local archipelago of tactically created places in which gay men and lesbi women live their sexual subjectivities, a national archipelago of cities and rural sites where the gay and lesbi worlds are known to exist, and a global archipelago where gay and lesbi Indonesia is like an island alongside Holland, Australia, Thailand, and the United States. To be "gay" in "Texas" is not just local.

 

Figure 5–3. Intersecting global, national, and local discourses; the GAYa Dewata symbol (original in red).

Just like a person fluent in English may be unable to explain the English grammar they use every time they speak, persons cannot always comment directly on the assumptions that shape their consciousness and social relations. Yet sometimes the influence of national discourse is explicit, as in the "gay identity card" story from chapter 1, or in statements like "When I was still with my former lover I never went to Texas or any other places…. It was only afterward that I entered the ‘Republic’ [Republik]." An explicit linkage also appears in the name GAYa Nusantara, which means both "archipelago style" and "gay archipelago," and the fact that groups of gay men and lesbi women across the archipelago name their groups with terms incorporating GAYa. The symbol for the group GAYa Dewata in Bali, which engages in some HIV prevention work (fig. 5-3), is an AIDS ribbon inverted and turned around so that it looks like a ceremonial Balinese male headdress. This image intertwines discourses of local, national, and international provenance with AIDS discourse and the archipelago concept’s requirement that every ethnolocalized region have a distinct character.

To analyze how state discourse shapes something as ostensibly intimate as sexuality, it is necessary to read between the lines of participant observation and divine cultural logics that may not be on the lips of one’s interlocutors. Yet situations arise in which these logics—the idea of the gay world, for instance—shine forth, if only in an offhand remark that otherwise passes unnoticed. Doel, a gay man from Surabaya, had flown to Makassar in July 2002 to meet with a gay organization. One afternoon we accompanied a group of about thirty gay men to volleyball practice in a big field near the Azhar mosque. Ten yards away another group of men were playing volleyball. Doel was sitting next to me watching our gay friends play when he suddenly sat up and exclaimed: "Those guys over there are speaking Javanese!" Karim, sitting nearby, said, "Yes, they’re Javanese men who work in the market." Then he added jokingly, "Doel, you should go hang out with them. You’re Javanese, after all!"

I think most gay and lesbi Indonesians would understand why Doel just turned to us and smiled: "Here is my world [di sini dunia saya]."